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In This Issue

No "theme" is this month's issue—just a heterogeneous collection of sf and fantasy game ideas. We've got another good Timothy Zahn story, along with an article to relate its magic blades to D&D... a review of FGU's new Aftermath (and a capsule review of the first supplement)... some worthwhile complexities for Traveller combat, and two more nonhuman races... Lew Pulipher's discourse on Diplomacy variants for science fiction and fantasy readers... and a comparison of three new computer fantasies!

You'll also notice that we've got some interior color this issue. If reactions are good, it may become a habit.

NOT in this issue is the oddball game I mentioned last month. As warned, it was subject to constraints of time and space—neither of which proved sufficient. We'll try again later.

—Steve Jackson

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WHERE WE'RE GOING

For once, the title of this column is 100% literally appropriate. The first announcement is... where we're going. We're going to 2700 Metcalfe, Austin, Texas 78741. By the end of August, our move should be substantially complete. (Our phone number and PO box will remain as before; use the new address ONLY for UPS and the like, please.) Due to the move, the magazine is running somewhat late this month. As this column goes in, we're about a week behind.

Our new space has—I hope—all the room we'll be needing for some time. In addition to a slightly expanded office area, it has a room we plan to make a "permanent playtest" headquarters, and a big warehouse area. It's also closer to town. A definite improvement.

* * *

Business goes well, I think. I've just gotten the initial sales figures on our latest releases. In one month, we sold approximately 3,600 Car Wars, 3,200 Undead, 3,000 Killer, and 1,700 Game Design. That's about half again what I was hoping for. Thanks...

* * *

New projects... The miniature vehicles for Car Wars are still a near-certainty. We're being VERY picky about the original sculpture, and I have to admit that there's a small chance that we'll never get any masters that are beautiful enough to accept. But I think we will. Work is also in progress on two Car Wars supplements, each of which expands the original game in a different direction. More on this in next issue.

Denis Loubet and Paul Jaquays are still working on their respective sets of Cardboard Heroes. We're still looking at a September release date for the four new sets: Denis' three batches of Monsters and Undead, and Paul's first set of 15mm Traveller figures.

Two other Cardboard Heroes projects have been waiting in the wings for quite a while: bases and floor plans. The bases would be totally optional: plastic gadgets for those who want a little more weight on their figures. The floor plans would be similar to various "dungeon floors" now on the market. The differences would be (1) they would be full-color, attractive "stone" floors; (2) they would be plastic coated, so you could mark them and then ERASE the marks, and (3) they would sell for only $5 a set.

* * *

A note on Killer: A lot of game stores are sponsoring games for their customers, but the best we've heard so far has come from Warriors, Wizards, and Robots, a California emporium. Their tournament is being GM'd by a private investigator... who used to play the game with other "private eyes" as an informal training aid. That ought to be a GOOD game... wish I could get in on it!

—Steve Jackson

GAME MASTER

GAME MASTER exists to answer questions on your favorite games. If you have a rules question or play problem, send it in. Questions to be answered will be chosen on the basis of general interest. They will be first referred to the game publisher or designer. If no response is received, GAME MASTER will offer its own interpretation of the rule. Sorry — no individual replies are possible.

Car Wars

"... I cannot find anywhere what is supposed to happen when a vehicle loses its power plant..."

David Dyche
San Diego, CA

I probably should have cross-referenced this under "effects of damage" — but it's there. Under the power plant rules (bottom of page 20) you will read "When the power plant is lost, a vehicle can no longer fire lasers or accelerate, but ALL other systems still work." The reasoning behind this is that most vehicle systems would be made as failsafe as possible: brakes, weapons, etc., would HAVE to function independently if the driver is to feel reasonably secure. The only exceptions are the wheel motors themselves and the laser, which takes up too much power to work without the motor.

—Steve Jackson

Raid on Iran

(1) At one point you state that the Americans can escape by reaching a street, but that this is more dangerous and costs the U.S. player victory points. Under the victory conditions there is no mention of this. What is the solution?

(2) If Iranian militants or mobs close-attack a helicopter, can that helicopter still attempt to leave — in other words, can helicopters leave with Iranians in the same area?

Overall, I really enjoy the game and find it a very clean system...

Bill Creed
Washington, DC

(The long arm of coincidence strikes! Two days after Bill's letter arrived, we got another letter, with the exact same two questions, from Michael Jenkins of Falls Church, VA.)

(1) The U.S. player should be docked one point for each person who escapes the embassy on the ground rather than in a helicopter.

(2) Yes, a helicopter may leave with Iranians in the same area. When they moved into its area and close-attacked it, they had their chance to disable it. If they were not successful, the helicopter is free to attempt to leave.

—Steve Jackson

Next Issue

Our October issue will have something special for SF miniatures gamers — a pull-out section on advanced armored combat rules for TRAVELLER:

Also, for D&D enthusiasts, there will be an article on realistic rules for radiation, and "Demography of a Fantasy World," by Lewis Pulsipher;

And, for SF role-players, a featured review of SPI's new game system, UNIVERSE.
STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Now ... three new games from the designer of OGRE, G.E.V., RAID ON IRAN, and THE FANTASY TRIP. More of the best values in gaming . . . at the lowest prices. And a new book that belongs in every serious game-player's library. Read on . . .

CAR WARS

Ever want to blow away the car that cut you off from the freeway . . . drop a few spikes to discourage a tailgater . . . take on a cycle gang with the twin .50-cals under your hood? Now you can.

In CAR WARS, players design freeway combat vehicles, with weapons, armor, and even body style. Then they take them out on the roads of the future— to come home 'aces,' or crash and burn.

Designed by Chad Irby and Steve Jackson. Includes 24-page rulebook, road grids, and FULL-COLOR counters (drawn by Loubet) for cars, cycles, wreckage, etc. Any number can play. $3.00 in stores, or $3.50 by mail from SJ Games.

UNDEN! A role-playing game inspired by Bram Stoker's classic Dracula. The vampire Count has come to London to spread death and terror. Moving on a map of the city, the vampire player tries to conceal his coffin and find new victims. His heroic pursuers search for his hiding places and try to alert the city. When the players meet, they battle—until the vampire flees, or one side is destroyed. For two or more players, with or without a referee. Designed by Steve Jackson. Components include full-color counters and city map; 24-page rulebook, and combat maps. $3.00 in your hobby shop, or $3.50 by mail direct.

KILLER

The controversial game that's being played across the country! KILLER is a "live" game. Each player tries to knock off one (or all) of the others, by fair means or foul. Usually foul. Waterguns or dart-guns replace pistols; an exploding balloon becomes a bomb, and so on. This is the first published set of rules for doing your friends in . . . without hurting them. Includes scenario suggestions; dozens of weapon simulators; and hints on keeping your game safe, legal, and not TOO mind-boggling to the rest of the world! KILLER is not for everybody— but if you want to test your reflexes and ingenuity in a way no paper game ever will, then this just may be for you.

Rulebook written by Steve Jackson. $5.00 in stores, or $5.50 by mail direct.

GAME DESIGN: Theory and Practice

Everything you ever wanted to ask about game design (but didn't know where to start). This authoritative book covers the field from both the theoretical/mathematical viewpoint and the practical angle. The general theory and history of wargaming lead into a detailed nuts-and-bolts discussion of combat, terrain, mapping and movement, component design, professional playtesting techniques, and more. A special chapter covers role-playing game design.

GAME DESIGN is co-authored by two authorities in the field. Nick Schuessler is publisher of the iconoclastic Journal of WWII Wargaming and has taught a University of Texas-sponsored course in wargame design. Steve Jackson is designer and/or publisher of several best-selling games. Whether you're interested in "simulation," "playability," or both, this book covers what you need to know. Much of this material originally appeared in The Space Gamer, but has been extensively revised and updated, with new material added (including a full bibliography).

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SF Character Contest Results

Our June contest invited readers to submit Traveller statistics and data up to three heroes or villains of science fiction literature. As usual when the contest is Traveller-related, there were less than thirty entries, but almost all of them were good.

The winner was Richard Bartucci. He picked three good characters from lesser-known (but still solid) backgrounds, and wrote them up in standard Citizens of the Imperium format:

**Captain Bob Schuster**
99A8R7
Age: 46
8 Terms
Credits 65,000

**Space Mining and Maritime Troubleshooter.**

As long as colonies are planted on worlds with oceans, there will be a need for skilled mariners, and as long as new star systems' asteroid belts are exploited for the raw materials to build them, specialists in zero-G mining and manufacturing will be required.

This hard-bitten saltwater sailor is unique in having experience in both areas. Employed by a large supranational shipping and mining combine as troubleshooter and triggerman, his outspokenly critical way with government meddling and his penchant for antagonizing his own corporate hierarchy keep him shifting about on various unpleasant assignments. His skill in handling subordinates and his uncanny knack for finding solutions to the knottiest problems, however, make him too valuable to fire — if only because the competition would snap him up in an instant.

Pragmatic and sometimes abrasive with incompetence, he can be sociable if encountered en route from one system to another, and he can sometimes be found commanding a cargo ship (the nautical kind) on a colony world. Most of the time, however, he will be engaged in the tough task of shaking down a problem-plagued asteroid mining operation.

(From Captain Empirical by Sam Nicholson, 1979.)

**Credits 83,500**
Scout-Explorer, Writer, and Inadvertent Magician.

Single-minded in his pursuit of information on new worlds, this well-meaning but sometimes clumsy Scout seems to have an unfortunate propensity for antagonizing the inhabitants of the primitive planets he visits.

Trained as a biochemist and skilled as a writer of popular fiction and science for the non-scientist, he returns from his (usually-solitary) missions only to attend book promotions and major conventions of the Travellers’ Aid Society.

*If a company of adventurers including Purple should encounter a group of low-tech sorrows, it is likely that his “negative skill” in Liaison will, in spite of his best intentions, almost invariably cause him to insult and infuriate the natives; it is left to the referee’s discretion to determine the results of this unfortunate characteristic.

(From The Flying Sorcerors by David Gerrold & Larry Niven, 1971.)

**Jack Holloway**
9884A8
Age: 42 (Old, but going strong . . . )

**Gemstone Miner**

Self-sufficient and experienced in opening up dozens of new colony worlds, this tough character is currently working a solo mining claim deep in the wilderness of a planet in the Spinward Marches.

Adaptable at contact with extraterrestrials, he has a family of small (ca. 30cm. tall) autodroids living with him at his base camp. These little furry bipeds are tool-using forest-dwellers, intelligent but very low-tech (paleolithic-equivalent), amiable and outgoing. While timid in their natural habitat, “Pappy Jack”’s friends are familiar with humans, sometimes to the point of getting into things too delicate or too dangerous to permit their tinkering. The average characteristics of an adult are 187411 (on human scale). Roll 1D+3 for number.

If threatened, the bipeds will fight as a co-ordinated team using metal weapons made for them by their Terran humanoid friend, consisting of a steel shaft with a knobkerrie on one end and a blade at the other. The latter can be used for stabbing or slashing.

Holloway is extremely touchy when one of his charges is endangered or when he is threatened himself. Quick on the draw and deadly with projectile weapons, he is not one to cross lightly (“Last time anybody pulled a gun on him, they called it suicide.”).

At any time, Holloway may carry on his person up to 80,000 Credits in uncut gemstones (roll 1D+2 and multiply the result by 10,000 Credits).

(From Little Fuzzy and Fuzzy Sapiens by H. Beam Piper, 1962 and 1964.)

Any of these three characters is the sort that a Traveller ref would have no trouble working into a standard scenario, and any of them would be interesting game material.

Second place went to Gary E. Reilly, for his description of the two lead characters from Hammer's Slammers. Created by author David Drake, the Slammers are a crack armored force whose services are for sale to the highest bidder. As such, they could appear in a campaign — and they might well be involved in the Fifth Front War now in progress. If Gary had written up some stats on their heavy equipment, he would have come in first— but refs can supply that for themselves with a little work.

**Colonel Alois Hammer**

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Colonel Hammer is widely known as the commander of the highly successful mechanized mercenary force commonly known as Hammer's Slammers. On and off the battlefield, his tactical and strategic expertise have earned him a reputation as one of the best mercenary leaders in this section of the Imperium. Once he has accepted a contract, Hammer uses whatever means necessary to fulfill it, even though some of his tactics have been judged excessive by his critics. A man of great self-determination, Hammer is strongly dedicated to those who serve under him. In turn, loyalty by his troops
goes beyond all expectations (as seen by his high Social Standing).

Alois Hammer possesses a trim, hourglass figure that has been toughened by his military experience. Except when absolutely required by protocol, his dress consists of simple, but functional battle dress. Hammer's personal weapon is the 1cm powerpistol (treat as small version of the PGMP-14, 8D damage).

Joachim Steuben

Strength B Intelligence A
Dexterity E Education 8
Endurance C Social Standing 5
Skills: Pistol-6, Survival-4, Streetwise-3.

Joachim Steuben is Alois Hammer's right-hand man and chief confidant. At first, his immaculate dress and boyish-slim figure may mislead people. Behind his nearly feminine features, Steuben maintains a fierce and fatal personality. His intense loyalty to Hammer verges on fanaticism. Anyone offering even the slightest perceived insult or danger to Hammer will become the target of Steuben's hatred.

Steuben's combination of speed (Dexterity E) and gun accuracy (Pistol-6) make him a fatal enemy. His preferred weapon is a superbly crafted 1cm powerpistol. He is said to obtain pin-point accuracy at extreme ranges (in excess of one kilometer) with this gun. Imperial psyche-programs classify Steuben as extremely dangerous and to be handled with caution at all times.

Colonel Alois Hammer and his Slammers provide an excellent band of mercenaries for inclusion in any Traveller campaign. He may be willing to contract the Slammer's services to a player-character or may be actively seeking fresh recruits for his force. Unfortunately, indeed, is any player character who would come in direct conflict with the Slammers or their commander.

An honorable mention goes to Robert Weissinger for his tongue-in-cheek entry, based on Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. This material is probably too strange for many referees, and would require a good deal of interpolation before it could be used . . . but if you like Monty Python D&D adventures, you'll LOVE a "Hitchhiker" game of Traveller.

Zaphod Beeblebrox

UPP 897442
Age: 200 years - physical: 30 years

Beeblebrox, the ex-president of the Galaxy, is being searched for by the Galaxy's Police for stealing the Heart of Gold, the Infinite Improbability Drive prototype ship. (More data later.) Therefore, any contact with another ship will cause Zaphod to turn tail and run on a roll of 5+. DM +3 if Imperial Navy Ship, -1 for every level of Streetwise and Hitchhiker any one character aboard has. His most outstanding features are his two heads and three arms. In his third hand, which he always keeps in his pocket, he carries a Hypo-Gun (see Paranoia Press' Merchants and Merchandise). He has a very large stash of anagathics, explaining his long lifespan. He also carries several doses of Combat Drug.

Ford Prefect

UPP 777863
Age: 32

Ford Prefect is a researcher for The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, who, along with his friend Arthur Dent, manages to escape from the Earth moments before it is demolished to make way for a Hyperpsace bypass. In his possession is the Guidebook, an electronic device which gives information (sometimes wildly inaccurate) about the galaxy; a Sub-Ether Sens-o-Matic, a device used to signal ships to try and hitch a ride; and, most importantly, a towel.

Arthur Dent

UPP 687552
Age: 30 years
Skills: Towel-1.

Arthur is only a highly confused person trying to make some sense of a very confusing galaxy. He knows only the barest minimum knowledge needed to survive in the universe, and therefore he is constantly referring to the Hitchhiker's Guide.

*New Skills:

Con: Basically, the ability to pull a fast one, i.e., selling the Brooklyn Bridge, selling used spaceships, etc. To see if a con scheme works, the referee rolls 2D vs. the mark's Intelligence - the Con level of the con. If the roll is equal to or higher than this number, the con has worked, but on a 12, the con was discovered.

Hitchhiker: Basic knowledge in how to hitch a ride aboard spaceships. The base roll is determined by the referee for a chance of getting aboard, and is modified thusly: DM+1 for each level of Hitchhiker, +2 if ride is interstellar, -5 if no Hitchhiking ability, -1 for every additional person taken. If the modified roll on 2D is the base or higher, you get on.

Towel: Knowledge of the proper utilization of that item which is most useful to a hitchhiker - a towel. In combat, treat as a club for range and armor modifiers. A towel does 1D+1 damage, and each time the target is hit, he must make a saving throw (3D vs. Endurance). Failure causes unconsciousness for 2-12 (2D) minutes. For more uses of a towel, check The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

Gadgets, Ships, and Robots

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

The ship Heart of Gold

High Guard: Statistics: YZ-K2=ZZ/F1-000050-000000-0
Mass: 10,000 Tons
Cost: 1,000 GCr
Passengers: 4; Low; Cargo: 200 Tons
Fuel: 300 Tons; Agility: Z

Yes, that's right. This ship has infinite jump and maneuver-Z. The jump drive, in this case, is the Infinite Improbability Drive, which basically allows a ship to jump between the stars almost instantaneously, but there is always the chance of mis-jumps (roll 11+, no DMs for each jump). The computer is designed to basically run the ship by itself. It has a happy, cheerful personality, and answers to the name of "Eddie." This ship is Tech Level 18.

Marvin, the Paranoid Android

Cost: 5 MCr
Type IV chassis and leg propulsion units
Basic Sensor Package, Voder/Vocoder unit
Large robotic brain
Programming: Pilot-2, Navigator-2, Manic-Depressive / Paranoid personality, and a telepathic package allowing for Probe ability.

This should be enough for most referees to start with. Share and enjoy!

The May contest invited readers to design Combine light units for Ogre/G.E.V. Reluctantly, we're going to have to invoke our "no winners" clause . . . the response was relatively small, and none of the designs we received seemed both workable and futuristic. We got some pretty good "Buck Rogers" ideas, and several reworked M-60s - but that wasn't really what we were after. So it goes.
If I had to do it over again, I think I would have followed the advice my first warmaster gave me many years ago: never, never, buy anything from a wandering wizard.

Don't get me wrong, now — except for a few rotten finefruit, wandering wizards are pretty much honest, helpful sorts who are perfectly harmless unless you spit in their eyes or forget to bow the requisite number of times or something. Melcs-fae was one of these upstanding types. And the sword itself is exactly as described: one black-hilted falchion, djinn-possessed, length and weight somewhat variable. A good bargain . . . probably . . .

I suppose I'd better start at the beginning. It was in early summer, as I was coming back from the sack of Trel Castle with the fifteen thousand gold pieces that was my fair share of the loot. (Well, maybe a little more than my share; but I was the one who had to clear out that dungeon, after all.) Fifteen thousand gold pieces weigh a lot. I'd ruined one horse already and was fast losing a second when I came upon Melcs-fae the wizard.

He was sitting under a tree singing quietly to himself — or so I thought until I saw the griffin sitting enchanted in the branches over his head. At first I figured the wizard was using a spell to keep the beast at bay — it's sure what I would have been doing — but as I came closer I saw it shift its wings slightly and realized Melcs-fae was simply using the griffin as a mobile sunshade.

I was just starting to pass him by, keeping a wary eye on the griffin, when he opened his eyes. "Greetings to thee, Warrior," he said. "Come and tell me where thou art bound."

Knowing better than to refuse, and glad of a rest anyway, I went over. "I am called Conkar of Masaar, noble Wizard," I said, bowing five times — the number of silver stars spangled on his belt. He moved his arm slightly, uncovering the sixth star; hastily, I bowed again. "I seek no particular land, only adventure."

"And wealth, too," he said, eying my horse's burden. "I am Melcs-fae, Wizard Sixth Rank. Dost thou intend to travel far with thy plunder?"

I was pulling the heavy bags off the horse and letting them thump to the ground. "I'd hoped to at least get it to Borsil, where I could buy gems or something else a little easier to carry."

"There are many thieves between here and Borsil," the wizard rumbled. "Against them even a powerful adventurer might have great difficulty."

I'd already worried some about that without coming up with any good answers. "I don't suppose you'd be willing to accompany me for a proper fee."

He shook his head. "My path lies in a different direction. But perchance I may aid thee in another way."

Reaching into the pack that lay at his side, he produced an ordinary-looking black-hilted falchion — ordinary-looking, that is, until he drew it from its scabbard and I saw the distinctive mirror-finished blade. "Tis a djinn sword," he identified it unnecessarily, handing it to me.

I'd never actually held a djinn sword before, and I felt both exhilarated and a little scared as I swung it back and forth a few times. It was amazingly light, and didn't seem like it would pack much punch. I said so and Melcs-fae smiled. "Try it on you limb," he suggested, pointing to a branch as thick as my thigh.

I took a swing, and damn near severed the branch completely. Just before the impact, the sword suddenly got a whole lot heavier, and the extra weight drove it two-thirds through the branch with ease.

"I'm impressed," I said. The sword came out of the branch easily, too.
"The djinn can also change the length and breadth somewhat," Melko-sa-fae said, which explained why it had been so easy to withdraw. "Two would be extraordinary protection for thee."

I rubbed my chin. I was sick of always being on the receiving end of enchanted weaponry, and djinn swords were supposed to be effective against a wide range of magical spells, as well. "How much do you want for it?" I asked.

"Tis a most valuable instrument," he said thoughtfully, probably trying to estimate how much I had in my bags. "But for a truly noble adventurer I would ask a mere seventeen thousand gold pieces."

I slid the sword back in its sheath, drew it experimentally, and made a face. "Thirteen," I offered.

We eventually settled on fourteen thousand seven hundred, plus the horse and my old sword. Even at that it was a hell of a deal, and as I walked away leaving him under his griffon I wondered why he'd been so eager to deal. Probably just liked my face, I decided.

"So, you're going to take me on adventures, huh?" the sword said in a tinny voice as we topped the first hill.

Not being used to my equipment talking to me, I jumped. "Uh, yes," I told it, feeling a little strange.

"Great," it said. "Old Melko-sa-fae's too sedate for my tastes. Oh, by the way, my name's Whehalken - he forgot to introduce us. Where are we going first?"

"Oh, I don't know. I seek no particular land..."

"Yeah, I heard that part already. Silly way to run a business, if you ask me."

I bristled. "I didn't actu..."

"Why don't you go after particular targets?" Whehalken went on as if I hadn't spoken. "The haunted cave at Toulerec, say, or the Westfalben treasure, or even the Jewels of Horriere."

"Forget Horriere," I'd heard stories about the Jewels, and about what was guarding them, and I wanted no part of that. But the Westfalben thing sounded interesting. "What's this Westfalben treasure?"

"It's supposed to be a large pile of gold and jewels bound up with a fire djinn and guarded by a few basilisks and may be a weretiger or two."

"Great," I growled. "That's all, huh? Just how big an expedition are you planning, anyway?"

"Just you and me," he sounded surprised. "I thought you were a big, powerful warrior. You afraid of a few basilisks?"

"Let's say I'm cautious. I want to live long enough to enjoy any treasure I find - it's a personality quirk."

Whehalken snorted. I'd never heard a sword snort before, but he managed it. "Oh, for - Maybe we ought to attack a greengrocer, then. Safer."

"All right, knock it off!" I snapped. "Until someone dies and you're appointed king, just keep your mou- just keep quiet."

"Well, I don't know why you bought me if you're not going to listen to my advice," he muttered.

He had a point. Djinn swords were supposed to be basically truthful - except wraiths, which always have red blades - and they did seem to have private ways of learning things. I thought about it for two more hills before speaking again. "So you think we can take Westfalben, eh?"

Silence. "Whehalken, are you there?"

I asked tentatively, tapping the hilt with my right fingernail.

"You told me to keep quiet," he said petulantly. "Make up your mind."

"Look - I took a deep breath and swallowed my irritation. "All right, yes, I want your advice. Really."

"Yeah, I think we can take it," he said briskly, changing moods with the speed of a unicorn's party. I began to wonder if he'd been faking the grumpiness. "It's about four days' journey away, west and a little north of here. We take the north branch when this road splits a few miles ahead."

"Well... I suppose we can at least go and take a look around."

"Sure," he agreed. "You can always back out then if you want..."

I didn't say anything. But I was beginning to wonder if Whehalken had been such a good bargain after all.

**

Nightfall found us about half a mile from one of the ugliest manor houses I'd ever seen.

"Who owns this place?" I asked Whehalken as we trudged toward it through the light undergrowth which was all that remained of our branch of the road.

"Last I knew the Kagan Pentalas owned all this territory. Fancies himself a warrior and a wizard, but isn't much good as either. You going to ask for lodging?"

"I sure don't want to stay out here all night. I'd been keeping an eye on the woods that bordered our path, and had caught glimpses of large animals that I had no desire to meet by moonlight, djinn sword or no. "Why, don't you trust him?"

"Who, me? We spirits aren't in the trusting business, Conakar. When we get trusting we get locked into swords and treasures and stuff," he sounded bitter. "Oh." I couldn't think of anything else to say.

We reached the manor house - a four-story bastard-castle sort of monstrosity - before it got really dark. I didn't much care for the doorwarder's looks, but he welcomed me courteously enough and conducted me inside to meet the Kagan Pentalas. Fortunately, Whehalken didn't say anything, and except for a sort of strangled choke halfway down the hall, I didn't hear a peep out of him.

Pentalas had done his formal chamber as a miniature of the throne room at Bagdathida Major, and I had to admit he looked rather impressive seated there on his fan-shaped chair, a stylized roc head peering over each shoulder.

"So, Conakar, what brings you to the modest demesne of Wesgard?" he asked in a rumbling voice after we'd exchanged names and he'd offered me a bed for the night.


His eyes narrowed fractionally, and I instantly regretted saying anything about wealth. A second-rate wizard, Whehalken had called him; but the more I looked around the throne room the less I believed that. The carved wooden ceiling beams were far too heavy to be held up by their narrow wall connections alone, the five gold-and-crystal chandeliers glowed brightly without benefit of candles, and some
of the statues lining the walls were following me with their eyes. The whole place stank of enchantment. And if that wasn’t enough, the ten or eleven retainers who were lined up around the walls looked slightly trollish and extremely mean. The last thing I wanted Pentalas to think was that I was going treasure-hunting on his property. “Actually, I’m on my way to win the Westfalren treasure,” I added hastily.

“I see.” He didn’t seem particularly relieved. “You are a brave man indeed to venture such a quest alone. Or do you have powers of which I am unaware?”

“Tell him your great-uncle buried the treasure, so you’ve got a legitimate

claim,” Whehalken murmured unexpectedly, just loud enough for me to hear.

“I have the power of rightful claim,” I told Pentalas loftily. “My great-uncle originally owned the hoard.”

“Ah? But possession is usually more telling than rightful claims,” the Kagan pointed out.

Whehalken whispered something else. “I am willing to dispute that,” I said, again following the sword’s suggestions. “Justice will overtake all despellers in the end.”

There was a slight murmur from the men along the walls — and not one of admiration. Casually glancing around, I noticed with some uneasiness that four of the retainers had drifted closer to the double doors that were the room’s only visible exit. I wondered what the hell was going on — were they siding with the djinn and basilisks at Westfalren?

Pentalas broke into my thoughts. “I sense another power about you; an enchantment or other sorcery. Have you perchance a magic blade?”

“Oh a sort,” I said. If they liked djinns and basilisks . . . “My blade is djinn-possessed.”

It was like someone had cast a spell . . . or maybe someone did. Suddenly the tension in the room was thick enough to brace battlements with. I’d been right about the trollish looks, after all — and trolls do not like djinns. I was beginning to sweat heavily, and it was all I could do to keep my hands peacefully at my sides.

Pentalas leaned forward, a glint in his eye. “Interesting,” he murmured. “Perhaps you would allow me to see it.”

I reached slowly to my belt with my left hand, thinking furiously. I didn’t dare draw Whehalken — an action like that could be misinterpreted even under the best of conditions, which these weren’t. But with a dozen unfriendly faces around me, I didn’t want to hand over my only sword, either. “Perhaps in the morning I can give you a full demonstration of his abilities,” I suggested lamely.

“Not now,” he said. “That would best be done outside, in the daylight.”

Slowly he leaned back again, the glint still in his eyes. “Very well,” he rumbled. “But you must be tired. Harbrec will show you to your room.”

I bowed low, glad to be leaving. “Thank you, O Kagan Pentalas —”

And without missing a beat Whehalken chimed in, “— usurper of the throne of Wesgard,” he added, duplicating my voice exactly.

Pentalas leaped to his feet with a roar, snatching his sword from its sheath. As if that was the signal they’d been waiting for, the others drew their own weapons and charged.

“Wait a second!” I yelled over the trollish battle cries. “I didn’t — Whehalken, why the hell —”

“Would you rather have been murdered in your sleep?” he snapped. “Drag, will you? Pentalas is practically on top of you.”

He was, too, bearing down on me with a fire-tipped blade that had to be a shaped elemental. Even as I yanked Whehalken out I knew there was nothing I could say that would stop the Kagan’s attack. He must really be a usurper to be this mad, I realized, and I wondered what the hell Whehalken was trying to do.

Pentalas was almost in range, his sword already starting its downward sweep when I finally moved, feinting left and then leaping right. Pentalas didn’t fall for it; his sweep shifted angle to aim directly toward my skull. I whipped Whehalken up to block — and saw, too late, the bodkin in Pentalas’s left hand arcing for my side. I braced myself to twist aside — and just then our swords met.

There was a flash of fire and a screech that froze my blood and nearly drowned Pentalas’ bellow. He jerked back, looking dazed, halve of a dull gray sword clutched in his hand. With some small hope of retrieving the situation, I gave him the flat of my blade instead of chopping his head off. Spinning around to face the charging part-trolls, I threw my arms straight up over my head. “Stop!” I shouted . . . and as my arms reached full extension Whehalken flew out of my hand.

I’m a swordsman; I’ve been handling blades since my fifth birthday, and I do not lose hold of them in mid-battle. Even as I dived for the throne where I had seen Pentalas’ bodkin go skittering I knew what had happened; Whehalken had pulled his size-changing trick with the hilt. Whehalken had deserted me, deliberately.

I grabbed the bodkin in my left hand — my own dagger was now in my right — and spun around, pressing my back to the throne. At least it would be quick, I told myself bitterly. The howling part-trolls, the scent of blood already beclouding their minds, would reach me in seconds; and with my dying breath I would curse Whehalken and his treachery. For all the good that would do.

And then, without warning, there was a sudden thunderous clatter and an ear-splitting scream, and the whole ceiling collapsed above us.

I woke up, probably no more than a few minutes later, with a throbbing headache. Levering myself in stages to a sitting position, I peered around me at the darkened room — darkened because the chandeliers had gone out and the only light came from a handful of high windows.

The room was a mess. Beams and broken crystal lay everywhere. Underneath them, at various places, lay unnerving forms. I stayed where I was until I could account for Pentalas and all his troops, and then got carefully to my feet. “You okay, Conakar?” Whehalken’s voice came from across the floor. “Come over here and get me, will you? I’m stuck into one of the beams.”

“Sure I will,” I growled as sarcastically as I could. “Great idea. It’ll give you another chance to kill me.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I saved your life
— or could you have handled all those fighters yourself?"

That was a good point. But — "No, but it was your fault they attacked me in the first place. You and that stupid insult — in my voice, yet."

"Well, he did usurp the demesne, or so I’ve heard—"

"Who cares? You didn’t have to goad them like that!"

"I did if you want the Westfalren treasure. It’s downstairs."

"And that stuff — what? The treasure? How do you know?"

"Pentalas left the fire djinn in the hoard when he brought it back, probably pretty recently. I sensed it when we came in."

"So that stuff about being the rightful heir was just to make them nervous, huh?"

I was still mad, but the logic of the scheme was getting a lot clearer. "But why couldn’t you have waited until I’d at least had a night’s sleep?"

"Because they were all together in this room," Whehalken explained patiently. "They might not have been all here in the morning."

"So? Oh — the ceiling." I craned my head upwards and winced. "How’d you do it?"

"Simple. Like I said, Pentalas is — was — a rotten wizard. Most of his impressive magic was done by captured spirits. I just released the ones holding up the ceiling and lighting the chandeliers and down it all came. I figured you’d be safe enough there by the throne or I’d have yelled a warning."

"Thanks. You were almost right."

"Sorry. Well, come on — all we have to do is go downstairs and release the fire djinn and the treasure’s yours."

Clutching the back of my head, I stumbled through the wreckage toward Whehalken’s voice. It couldn’t be this easy, I told myself.

But it was.

***

With the aid of a stunned cartage-dragon we found chained up in the stable, we got the treasure — minus flame djinn — to Borsil, where I sold the whole lot for a horse, extra armor and supplies, and some very fine gems. I’d planned to go next to Ezahel, but Whehalken has heard rumors of a treasure buried at the foot of a permanent waterspout somewhere south of Jal. We argued about it some, but in the end I gave in. After all, Whehalken does seem to know what he’s doing.

Which bothers me just a bit...

Sure, Whehalken’s explanation of the Pentalas affair fits the facts well enough; and he did get me a lot of treasure with ridiculously little effort. But I can’t throw the feeling that he wasn’t really doing any of it for me, that saving my neck may have been merely a way of accomplishing his real goal. You see, I keep remembering his bitterness when talking about trapped spirits like himself, and the fact that in getting me the Westfalren treasure he managed to liberate eight of them, counting the elemental in Pentalas’s sword. That’s a lot of spirits for a single night’s work... especially since he didn’t have to free the chandelier spirits to get me out of that jam.

But even if I’m right, I suppose I really don’t have any reason to complain. As long as Whehalken protects me and helps me get rich, it’s none of my business what sort of private quest he wants to pursue. But it’s sort of embarrassing to find myself acting as a glorified cartage-dragon for a sword. I hope I can keep anyone else from finding out — I have a reputation to consider.

Anyway, I guess I know now why Mela-sa-fae was so eager to sell me the sword. And I think that the next time I meet a wizard on the road I’ll just keep walking.

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**Bound Spirit Blades in D&D**

A bound spirit sword is created in the manner you would expect — by conjuring a spirit and binding it into a blade. The creator must be able to conjure or summon the creature involved, and must perform the following spells: Enchant an Item, Trap the Soul, Limited Wish, and Permanency. Bound spirits are powerful, but always somewhat contrary.

A bound spirit sword has the same alignment as the spirit. It has an intelligence equal to the spirit’s, and an ego equal to its wisdom (roll 3d6 unless otherwise specified). If it speaks, it can use any language normal for that creature.

In effect, a bound spirit is an NPC controlled by the DM. It may not actively seek its own release, but may complain as much as it likes, or try to dominate its owner. If a spirit blade is broken, the spirit is released.

**Demon & Devil Blades**

These are almost as dangerous as cursed blades. They do not contain all the powers of the spirit involved, since it must be weakened to be bound. Demon blades are dull black, and warm to touch. Devil blades are shiny black and icy cold. Both kinds communicate telepathically.

A blade from a Type IV-LI demon or lesser devil is +1. A blade from a Type IV-VI demon or greater devil is +2. There are rumors of blades made by binding demon lords and arch devils, but they are probably just rumors.

Either kind of blade will allow the owner to Detect Good and use Infravision. Also, it will convey a degree of magic resistance equal to the spirit’s. In addition, demon blades have the power to create darkness in a radius of 15 feet. (The bearer can see through the darkness.) Devil blades can create fear in any being struck (save as against wands).

Demon and devil swords are sometimes given to evil characters as part of a pact, or rewarded for services rendered. They lie freely, and will always try to dominate their wielders.

**Djinn Blades**

Djinn are perhaps the most agreeable of bound spirits. Djinn blades appear highly polished, gleaming like mirrors. They can speak any language.

Djinn blades are +2. They can create matter, whirlwinds, and illusions like a djinn. They enable their owners to become invisible, but not to fight in that form.

Djinn never lie. They will never intentionally betray a master of the same alignment, though they may trick him into serving their own interests. Also, their judgment is not perfect; they can get their masters in trouble accidentally.

**Ethereal Blades**

Ethereal blades are froward and sometimes dangerous. They shine like djinn blades, but with a reddish cast, and are warm to touch. In battle, they appear as flaming swords. They can speak any language.

Ethereal blades are +2; against cold-using creatures and undead, they are +4. Damage taken from an ethereal blade counts as fire damage for purposes of regeneration. They can detect magic, create illusions, and create a wall of fire as can an ethereal. They enable their users to become invisible, but not to fight in that form. Ethereals cannot tell a literal lie, though they often distort the truth. They treat owners of any alignment equally insolently.

**Elemental Blades**

An elemental must be weakened to be bound at all, so these blades are not as powerful as the others. However, they are dumb, and relatively easy to control. Elemental blades are +1. They do not communicate.

Fire blades are red-grey and hot to touch. They are +3 versus cold-using creatures and undead. Damage taken from a fire blade counts as fire damage for purposes of regeneration.

Water blades are blue-grey. They enable their users to breathe water and move freely through water.

Earth blades are granite-grey. They can be used to tunnel through earth at 5 feet a minute, or through rock at 1 foot a minute.

Air blades are silvery grey. They enable the owner to fly at 18" a turn.

**Invisible Stalker Blades**

When seen, these appear vague and translucent. They can speak, mostly to curse and give insult.

An invisible stalker blade is +2. It enables the user to become invisible and to attack in that form, also to Detect Invisible and to track as a 5th level ranger.

Invisible stalkers are generally obedient but obnoxious. They make no secret of their displeasure with their owners and with things in general.
FEATURED REVIEW:
SwordThrust
by Forrest Johnson

Recipe for an excellent computer game: Start with an adventure/dialog program — you Open Box, Get Sword, Attack Monster, and so on. Add some features of an FRP game. You have a “character” with “characteristics.” He can get tired and rest, or be wounded and then healed. The piece de resistance — your character is reusable. He can be transferred from adventure to adventure, read directly from one disk to another, complete with equipment, gold and experience.

This is SWORDTHRUST, the creation of Donald Brown. His name is familiar to those who have played Eamon. But SWORDTHRUST is a commercial effort, and is more complete than the earlier game.

The System

Much of SWORDTHRUST will seem familiar to FRP gamers. When you boot the master disk to create your first character, you see three characteristics — “hardiness” (read ST), “agility” (read DX) and “charisma” (read charisma). These will range from 1 to 30. Charisma is the most important of the three. In this game, the greatest hero is he who makes his enemy his friend.

Your character starts with 200 g.p. and can buy any of five kinds of weapons, three kinds of armor, and two kinds of shields. Ten magic spells are available; most are too expensive for beginning characters. One can also visit a tavern and pick up rumors, can buy some training, or leave his money at the bank.

Each weapon has a base chance to hit, and deals a variable amount of damage (a sword does 1d8, a mace 1d4). Shields and armor absorb damage, but reduce your chance to hit. Neither shield nor armor can absorb damage indefinitely, but it’s hard to tell how much punishment one will take.

Each weapon, and spell, counts as a skill to be learned separately. There are also skills for parrying, using a weapon left-handed and wearing armor without DX penalty. Successful use of a skill may improve your level of ability.

Combat is straightforward. Fight or flee is your main option. However, you can also throw a spell, pick up a dropped weapon, or simply rest a turn.

Of course, “friends” are no help in figuring out a puzzle adventure, and they do require some upkeep — healing spells and sometimes a gift of weapons. Also, your small army disappears at the end of each adventure, and you must start the next one alone. But there are a lot of peculiar effects:

In one adventure, described below, Tuan made friends with a vampire. It watched amiably while Tuan looted its treasury, and as he made “friends” of Arthur Godalming and Mina Harker. (Don’t ask.) It helped kill a number of monsters which weren’t impressed with Tuan’s charisma, and watched while Tuan took their treasure for himself. Later Tuan, with his “friends” present, was told he would have to kill the vampire to complete his quest. This did not seem to alarm the vampire at all. However, when Tuan gave it a gold coin, it became furious and attacked him. (It was pounded flat.)

This weirdness is explained in the rules, but I think the programmer could have handled things better. I have never met anyone who let me have his bank account simply because he liked my boyish good looks. These “friends” should demand wages or a share of the loot.

Charisma

I learned the hard way that good charisma is vital for SWORDTHRUST characters. No matter how mighty a swordsman, an adventurer won’t get far without friends.

Monsters are either (1) hostile and attack you, (2) neutral and ignore you, or (3) friendly and follow you around, attacking hostile monsters. A character with high enough charisma can recruit a small army at no expense.

Of course, this is factored into the adventures. Some monsters are friendlier than others, and many of the hostile ones can only be defeated by a small army.

This seems like a design flaw. My character, Tuan, with CHA 24 and a charm spell, doesn’t get to fight much anymore.

Weak Points

There are a number of flaws. The absence of graphics will bother some people. (But not me; how much “graphics” do you get with D&D?)

You have to bargain every time you buy something. Bargaining can be dull. I’d rather be adventuring.

The encumbrance rules are a bit silly. How come a guy with three suits of armor and six weapons is “lightly encumbered?” (On the other hand, how many players really want to worry about encumbrance?)

Lastly, there are a number of errors in the otherwise commendable documentation.
Strategy

This is not a complicated game, but it does take some strategy. Most of it is obvious, but there are some tricks the designer may not have considered.

My central strategy is, I don't play unless I have a decent character. It may be possible to make your way in the world with CHA 4, but I wouldn't want to try. There is a suicide routine to dispose of really weak characters, but I have sometimes found it profitable to reboot the program and take character generation from the beginning. (Incidentally, the programmer could have eliminated this "strategy" if he had opted for point allocation instead of conventional dice-rolling as a basis for character generation.)

I accept combat with discretion, avoiding a "fair fight" like the place of honor at a hanging. Who wants to be fair? If threatened by multiple opponents, I flee. Monsters pursue on a percentage basis, but "friends" always flee with you. Using this tactic, I can pick off monsters one at a time. (The programmer could have made things harder by having monsters move in a group, or giving "friends" a chance of fleeing in the wrong direction.)

I wring every possible advantage out of the program. For example, if you try to move normally in a room with hostile monsters, the program tells you that you can't. This amounts to a "free" way to find out whether hostile monsters are present; the other methods are dangerous.

These "strategies" would never get past a DM, but they can be vital for a SWORDTHRUST adventure.

The Testing Ground

Included on the master disk is "The King's Testing Ground," an introductory dungeon. It has much the same flavor as the T&T solo adventures.

You may lose a few characters here at first, but soon you will be running them through blindfolded. It is just a way to build up your characters; it has no other function or theme.

There is a subroutine which excludes experienced characters from the testing ground.

The Vampyre Caves

The first "adventure supplement" released for SWORDTHRUST is a puzzle scenario. Your character has been victimized by a vampire. Unless he finds some way to remedy this lamentable condition, he probably will not survive the next sunrise. In other words, you solve the puzzle or you die. This is not a nice, safe way to pick up experience.

"Sunrise" is a good touch. The computer displays the game time (not real time) with each update. At 6:00 a.m., the time is displayed in reverse, and your character starts weakening. This helps to keep you from dawdling.

Like any adventure, this one can "wear out." It takes generations of characters to solve the puzzle, and a real hero to get through it all. But given these prerequisites, it is childishly easy. There might be some challenge in getting through with a weak character, but I feel little urge to try.

SWORDTHRUST is not the best game of its type; it's the only. It has flaws, but so does every milestone.

More adventures are promised. I cannot think of any games I await more eagerly. SWORDTHRUST (CE Software, 801 73rd St., Des Moines, IA 50312; $29.95, 48K disk for the Apple, DOS 3.3. Game comes with 28-page, 5½" x 8½" booklet, bagged. One player; playing time 30-60 minutes. Adventure cannot be saved. (Surviving characters can.) Published 1981.

THE VAMPIRE CAVES (CE Software; $24.95, 48K disk by Donald Brown for the Apple, DOS 3.3. One player; playing time 1-3 hours. Can be saved. Published 1981.

The first (though less important reason) for going with mere descriptions is that SwordThrust currently pushes at the edges of the Apple's limits. If I were to add pictures, I would have to remove some of the complexities of the game, and I was very unwilling to do that.

But, far more importantly, I have seen many of the graphics-based adventures, and none of them approaches even a medium-quality comic book, much less shows Frazetta-ish pictures. This is not the fault of the people who designed the games. The hardware available today simply cannot produce high-quality illustrations. Given the choice between vivid descriptions or bland illustrations, I chose the descriptions.

For now, that is. The SwordThrust products currently out were designed to give us a great deal of freedom in the future. We are experimenting with various different formats of games, including dungeons that can handle whole parties entering together, two-computer dungeons that pit two players against each other, fantasy wargames (where your character's gold equips your army), and even capabilities for designing your own adventures! With SwordThrust, we may finally have a universe that truly has no limits.

- Donald Brown
If you’re lucky enough to own or have access to an Apple II computer, you have available a dungeon master who will prove to be tireless, original, believable, and always ready to play. Some new fantasy role-playing programs which take full advantage of the Apple’s hi-res graphics and central processing computer brain are the next best thing to actually setting out on a real-life adventure.

The games — Ultima from California Pacific Computer, Hellfire Warrior from Automated Simulations, and Crush, Crumble and Chomp, also from Automated Simulations — are all available on floppy disk. Once the disks are inserted into an Apple’s drive, the electronic adventurer is off on any number of fantastic voyages.

**Hellfire Warrior**

Hellfire Warrior is the sequel to Automated’s much appreciated Temple of Apshai game which took Charles Roberts’ honors as best computer game at Origins. Hellfire extends the dungeon another four levels and raises the playing system to new heights of fun and eye-catching animation.

Hellfire’s dungeon-style levels are presented in the same manner as the game’s predecessor. Walls depicting hallways and chambers are drawn onto the screen. As you move down a hallway or into a chamber, the screen momentarily clears and then paints the new area you can see around you. You are represented by a small, detailed warrior figure on the screen.

One-key commands allow you to move your warrior persona in any direction, at one of nine speeds. As you move, you may examine walls you pass for secret doors and passages.

This is a true role-playing game; your character’s attributes are first rolled for you by the computer. As your character progresses through the various levels, his attributes will reflect his improvement. Further, your character can be stored on disk — much as a lead miniature would be put away in its velvet-cushioned box — until the next expedition is formed. You may also save a game in progress, or save an image of the state of the dungeon.

While Temple offered the bare necessities of outfitting one character before setting out, Hellfire has some additional “shop” options. You will visit with Gulik the armorer where you can purchase five types of armor, and five styles of weapons. Nordr the Apothecary sells healing salves and up to 13 different potions. Often, the effects of the potions are unexpected and they can change attributes either permanently or temporarily. Finally, you will want to visit with Malaclype the Mage who charges what the traffic will (or won’t) bear for enchanting weapons and armor and also offers various other magical goodies.

Once equipped as staunchly as your purse will allow, you’ll note that Hellfire has much more of a sense of mission than Temple had. Goals on each of the four levels are distinctly different. So, even though combat remains the same, you do not tire of repetitiveness. Combat, by the way, is the same as in Temple. As you move about, various hi-res monsters chase after you. You can fight with a sword and watch your warrior self parry, slash and thrust or use a bow — even a magic arrow. As you fight and move, an on-screen display keeps track of your fatigue level, your wounds, and offers other info as to room location, weight you are carrying, type of monster you are facing, and Howard Cosell-like reports on combat results blow-by-blow.

The fifth dungeon level (levels being numbered 5-8 to match up with Temple’s 1-4) is called the “Lower Reaches of Apshai” and will be the most familiar to players who are Temple aficionados. But, right away, you’ll note the monsters are far more vicious. It suddenly will become apparent as to why Hellfire characters are rolled with far more experience points than new Temple characters. This, by the way, is to my mind one of the game’s few faults. As a sequel to Temple I would have preferred that Hellfire accept veteran characters from the previous game. Only way now is to use the edit mode and give your old vet enough experience to survive.

The sixth level is a maze guarded by everything from centaurs to saytars to criothurs. Finding your way out and solving the puzzle is half the fun — but for the faint of heart, an encrypted clue is included in the game’s 64-page, illustrated manual.

The seventh level — “The Vault of the Dead” — puts you amidst hostile spirits. (At this point, most of my characters have rolled over and died in response to one threat or another.)

The final “Plains of Hell” level challenges you to rescue a warrior maiden from the eternal flames. (So far, she’s always stayed cooking on my disk.)

Hellfire Warrior is likely to be a contender at the next Charles Roberts awards — but this time, the competition will be fierce.

**Ultima**

Ultima is one of the most unique fantasy role-playing games I have seen — certainly the most unique one that will run on a computer. It offers a wealth of detail that makes its world a true sub-creation. (Sub-creation is a word originally coined by the wizardly philologist J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.” It means that a world is believable and may be imaginatively entered into. There is enough detail and layering that all is not instantly apparent, and all the rules hang together without any belief-destroying contradictions.)

First thing you do in Ultima is to make a character disk, your attributes rolled by the computer. Then you decide your race and specialty. You can be a human, dwarf, hobbit or elf and specialties include warrior, wizard, cleric and thief. Various attributes may be point-traded for other attributes to enhance certain of your character’s abilities. But, all this is similar to dozens of other games. The fun begins when you — in the persona of your character — enter the richly detailed world of Ultima.

The player disk is replaced with the game disk and you are suddenly presented with a hi-res map. The map shows forests, mountains, plains, seas and yourself positioned there. One-key movement commands move you in any direction — by scrolling the map. For what you see on the screen is only a very small part of the entire world of Ultima.

As you move about you will note that there are cities, castles and dungeon entrances mixed in with the various terrain. Your first goal will be to head for the nearest city to spend a bit of the gold jin-
gling in your novice-sized purse. On your way, hope that you meet no wandering monsters or thieves — in your at-the-start condition of being weaponless you would have to try to run away.

Once you reach a city your disk drive will whirr, the screen will clear and in place of the strategic map the in-city map display will be drawn. When in a city, you move your figure into various shops. The hi-res city is protected by little guards who are pictorially more muscular than your own displayed form. This is a good point to keep in mind as Ultima's rules allow you to attempt stealing from the stores — but if caught by an alert shopkeeper, all those guards will descend on you.

Also, watch out for the bard — there's one in every city. And, like a Victorian's dream of a stage entertainer come true, the bard is a happy leech who will follow you around only to steal the shirt off your back.

In the city you can buy (and sell) weapons, armor, transportation, magic spells, and food. Magic costs experience points as well as gold — but you will likely need some for dungeon activities (warriors will find the magic is easier to buy and can carry more). Weapons, armor, and transportation change with the game's level of technology.

That's right, the level of technology advances the longer you play the game, and as your character advances in levels of expertise. Ultima begins in medieval times but will literally take you into the space age. More on that later.

Once you leave the city you will want to set out for the nearest castle. Castles too have their own hi-res display of a walled courtyard with various nooks and crannies. Also present is a seated princess restlessly pacing her cell, a king ready to talk business or honor, a lot of very, very, very muscular guards and a few magic pools. (And another thief — this time a jester.)

In the castle, you will want to visit the king. For gold, the king has the power of increasing your hit points. And, if you offer him your service as a token of your fealty he will send you on a quest. It will be necessary to complete many quests before winning the game — before it is even clear how to win the game.

A good strategy at the beginning of the game involves traveling between close-by cities and castles. Keep fighting the wandering threats that crop up and in that way — if victorious in battle — you will slowly accumulate some gold. The gold can be used in cities to buy better weapons and armor, and in the castles to enhance your hit points. In this way, you can gradually build yourself into a more formidable character.

When you are sure you are ready it is time to make your first expedition into one of Ultima's many dungeons. But the dungeons are not for the faint of heart or the shy of high points.

Entering a dungeon puts you in the three-dimensional dungeon display. You see the walls and chambers done in a perspective as if you were really walking through these darksome lairs. Hidden traps abound so you will have to use the “i” for inform and search key often.

Ladders will tempt you to climb down to a lower level, but be sure you know how to get back to the entrance or you can quickly become lost. At this point you may be glad that you purchased a ladder-supply spell back in the last city you were in. Such a spell will let you create a ladder to a higher level if you find yourself in over your head.

There are force field barriers in the dungeon and more than thirty various monsters, all done in hi-res detail. You fight them with one-key commands either with your weapons or with your magic. If you triumph you gain in both experience and gold. If you lose, there goes your high points.

As the game continues you will find that the challenge becomes more and more intense. But, in counterpart, your alternative becomes richer. As technology improves you will find that the frigate you thought so useful a few levels back now looks exceedingly primitive. And that greatsword you were so proud of earlier looks like an antique compared to what you can buy now. (But to tell you more would spoil the real thrill of discovery that Ultima provides the new player.)

You will find that Ultima pushes the Apple II computer right up to its state-of-the-art limits. As a program it is amazing, as a role-playing game it is a gem.

Crush, Crumble and Chomp

While the above two games are both fairly complex, you may wish for a beer-and-skittles type computer game that you could play at one sitting. That maybe even you could explain to a wife, girlfriend or neighbor?

If so, get ready for the hilarious new Crush, Crumble and Chomp. Automated Simulations' newest entry is a computerized melding of Monsters! Monsters! and The Creature that Ate Sheboygan. Billed as "The Movie Monster Game," this disk turns you into a rampaging beast.

You can play the role as Goshilla the lizard creature, the sea-loving Kraken, the spidery Arachnis, the globular Glob, the maniacal Mechismo or the flying Mantra. Or, if you would like, the rules booklet details how to roll your own monster persona.

Once you've decided your monster, you choose where you want to destroy and rampage. Hi-resolution maps of New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Tokyo are included on disk. The maps show buildings, parks, skyscrapers, bridges, roads and water.

Also on the map with you are animated civilians, cars, police vehicles, tanks, national guard units and helicopters. The first rule of monstedom is — if it moves, eat it!

Monsters must grab and eat to keep their hunger level low enough that they do not go berserk.

Some monsters spit fire, others leave webs behind. All is done in real-time animation. And, the animation is so well done that playing CCC is like watching a late movie.

You even have a separate pictorial display that shows the position of your monster's head. This is important in aiming the little fellow's often worse-than-bad breath.

Various scenarios award points for destruction alone, for surviving a long time, for combat against soldiers, or for all of the above. But no matter what scenario you choose it is obvious that the programmer was a human — after all, the monster is always doomed. Whether you are gradually wiped out by the stings of the strange little soft creatures, or the mad scientist himself gets you (to the accompaniment of an on-screen "EEE-AARRGH!" message) your monstrous days are numbered.

But keep on crushing, crumbling and chomping right up to the final curtain call.

HELLFIRE WARRIOR (Automated Simulations); $39.95. Designed by Jeff Johnson and Jon Freeman. Program on disk or cassette for the Apple, TRS-80 and PET. One player; playing time hours or days. Can be saved. Published 1980.

ULTIMA (California Pacific); $39.95. 48K disk by Lord British for the Apple II. One player; playing time hours or days. Can be saved. Published 1981.

CRUSH, CRUMBLE AND CHOMP (Automated Simulations); $29.95. Disk for the Apple and TRS-80; cassette for the TRS-80 and Atari. One player; playing time 10-60 minutes. Published 1981.
Diplomacy Variants

by Lewis Pulsipher

The first science fiction and fantasy games distributed on a non-local basis were variants of Diplomacy. The earliest of these preceded the simple space wargame War of the Empires. The earliest of these were published in The Dragon 3, by one to two years, i.e., 1964 or '65. Diplomacy is a multi-player board wargame known to most strategic games players — Risk and Diplomacy are probably the most widely known conflict games in the world if one excludes traditional games such as chess. It is presently marketed in the native language in Germany, Brazil and Argentina, and in English in most western European countries.

The heart of Diplomacy is negotiation between the seven players who represent the Great Powers of World War I: Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Turkey. (It is not a simulation, of course — Turkey and Germany were not comparable in the war but Turkey is as strong in the game.) Facilitating the negotiations are simple game mechanics utilizing simultaneous movement of a total of 34 armies and fleets, with no luck involved. Deals and alliances are made and broken during the game, and no one can be certain whether other players will react as expected; in other words, the players themselves provide the challenge element. In the mid-60's, science fiction fans organized postal games of Diplomacy, players negotiating by letter and sending movement orders to a non-playing referee, who reproduced the orders and sent a copy to each player. Wargamers soon became involved, and today about 2,000 people worldwide play postal Diplomacy, and one magazine devoted entirely to articles about Diplomacy circulates to 1,000 people. Over 500 postal games have been completed, each requiring two to three years or more. Nearly 100 people act as referees, most editing and duplicating their own fanzines.

One of the attractions of Diplomacy is the simple but flexible game mechanics. The rules can be adapted to construct a strategic game on almost any subject requiring more than two sides. No other game, except chess, has engendered so many variations. Diplomacy variants differ from variations of other wargames in their scope. Variants often include a new board, and sometimes many rules are changed or added so that a virtually new game is the result.

There are over 600 published variants, ranging from a single rule change to monsters that retain only two aspects of Diplomacy, the “support” rule and the multiplier format. Since postal Diplomacy fandom grew out of science fiction fandom, SF/F variants naturally gained some following; Middle Earth II, in fact, was the first variant played by mail that was not merely a team version of standard Diplomacy. Because variants are usually amateur undertakings, often designed by someone with no previous experience and little long-term interest and reproduced by short run methods such as mimeograph, a great many are inferior games. Moreover, most variants are designed with postal, not face-to-face, play in mind. As a consequence of these shortcomings most variants are out of print, though there are archivists who can supply photocopies of many at cost (“variants banks”).

The variants I describe below are usually exceptional and often meet the best professional standards, but I have included all generally available SF/F variants, whatever the merit of the game. Abstract and near-future variants, which sometimes have titles that sound like SF/F, are not included. I have listed out of print variants for those who want full exposure to this fascinating sub-hobby. The title of any variant which cannot reasonably be played face-to-face is followed by an &; an asterisk (*) indicates that a non-playing referee is required.

Types of Variants

These variants can be divided into eight categories which will be examined in turn. These are:

1. “Balanced” variants based on Tolkien's books
2. “Realistic” Tolkien-based
3. Others based on fantasy stories and novels
4. Fantasy variants not based on any story
5. Variants based on SF novels and stories
6. Other miscellaneous SF
7. Other SF depicting a single solar system
8. Other SF covering many solar systems

A letter and number code and the designer's name follow the title. The code is my rating of the variant, to help guide the reader. The first letter is an expression of the care and skill with which the game and map have been constructed. A is best, E is worst. I have assumed that good play-balance is a very desirable characteristic, that is, each player should have about the same chance of winning the game. The number indicates how much the rules of Diplomacy have been changed, from 1, few changes to 5, almost everything changed. The second letter indicates how faithful the variant is to its novel or to the genre as a whole; believability and atmosphere, a feel of science fiction or of fantasy, also come into this, and the ratings is of course subjective. A is most faithful, E least. Consequently the "A" rated variants are the best, the reader choosing for himself what complexity level he desires since changes from standard rules usually entail greater complexity.

Following the description of each variant is an indication of how it may be obtained. DW (short for Diplomacy World) and VP (short for SF&F Variant Package) are explained at the end of the article.

Tolkien Variants

Tolkien variants are derived more or less from J.R.R. Tolkien's work, especially The Lord of the Rings trilogy. Some simply depict the war at the end of the Third Age, a few cover other eras, and others do not pretend to simulate any particular period. There is even one unpublished variant depicting events in a Fourth Age. There are special problems with these scenarios. The War of the Ring is simply not a multi-player situation; with minor exceptions, no negotiation is conceivable. Moreover, Sauron's physical resources ensured his victory if the Ring had not been destroyed. Given the scale of the Diplomacy game-system, it is virtually impossi-
ble to design anything that is both a balanced multi-player game and good simulation.

With one exception, all these variants use a multi-player format, since this is the heart of any Diplomacy-type game. Otherwise they fall into two categories, those variants which value play-balance above simulation, and those which emphasize "realistic" elements at the expense of play-balance. Unfortunately, the latter are badly flawed by the need to make Mordor almost as strong as all other countries combined (and even then it is unrealistically weak). If just one non-Mordor country is poorly played, or if one player decides that a certain second place finish is worth throwing the game to Mordor, the game is virtually over before it begins. This often happens. If all players are good and experienced, non-Mordor forces may reduce Mordor to a reasonable size, after which play resembles a normal Diplomacy free-for-all.

Balanced Tolkien Variants

These are usually called "Middle-Earth Diplomacy." 

Middle Earth II (B 1 E, Don Miller) was the earliest science fiction or fantasy game ever played, to my knowledge, except in a local area (e.g., the original Lunkhmar). The five players are Mordor, Gondor, Rohan, Rhovanion, and Arnor. Rules are standard, and the game has little resemblance to any Middle-Earth period. VP.

Middle Earth V (B 1 D, Lew Pulipher) departs from the earlier mold with an initial set-up which scatters each player's units: Elves, Men of the North, Gondor, Mordor, Harad-Rohan, Dwarves, and Angmar. VP (revised version).

Middle Earth VIII (B 1 E, L. Pulipher) is an 8-player simple variant with only one move-season per game year, again without much "simulation" to it. Available in an issue of News from Bree from Hartley Patterson, 10 Waterside, Woodburn Green, Bucks, England.

Unavailable variants:

Middle Earth I (C. Wells), Unfinished. 
Middle Earth III (D. Miller), Unfinished. 
Middle Earth IV (B 1 D, B. Mebane). 
Middle Earth VI (C 1 D, J. Beihl), Finished, but map never published. 
Middle Earth VII (B 1 E, L. Pulipher).

Realistic Tolkien

These variants always include a Ring piece which is secretly carried about by an army; double and triple strength armies; and a very powerful Mordor with units and home centers scattered about the map. If the Ring is taken into Barad-dur, one of the non-Mordor players (usually the Ringbearer) wins. In the more complex variants, especially Downfall of the Lords, there are pieces for Nazgul and most of the important personalities of the trilogy, No matter how ingenious they are, however, they suffer from the constraints mentioned above and are nice to look through but seldom good to play. The only one of these currently available is Downfall of the Lord of the Rings and The Return of the King (C 4 A, Hartley Patterson). VP.

Unavailable variants:

Mordor vs. the World I* (D. Miller), Not seen. 
Mordor vs. the World II* (D. Miller), Not seen.
Mordor vs. the World III* (D 2 C, D. Miller). 
Mordor vs. the World IV* (C 2 C, D. Miller). 
Third Age I* (C 2 C, B. Libby). 
Third Age II* (D 2 C, D. Morris and R. Sharp).
Lord of the Rings I* (C 3 B, J. Key). 
Lord of the Rings II* (B 3 C, J. Key). 
Downfall of the Lord of the Rings and The Return of the King II* (C 4 A, R. Sack). 
The Great Years* (D 3 C, K. Neuman). 
Belterland (C 3 C, S. Doubleday). First Age/Silmarrilion. 

In addition there are two typical Tolkien variants, both named War of the Ring. The first (A 1 B, L. Pulipher) is an attempt to synthesize the two styles, but with emphasis leaning toward play balance. The map looks more or less like the "real" thing, down to a chain of spaces along the Misty Mountains. The seven players in the standard version are Mordor, Harad, Saruman, Free Peoples of Rhovanion, Free Peoples of Rhome, Evil Folks of the North, and Gondor-Rohan, each with one fortress and one double army. Mordor has four armies altogether instead of three, rather like Russia in standard Diplomacy. There are several other versions for 4-6 players depicting various invasions in Gondor history, and finally a mild version of the "realistic" type for those who prefer that style, DW.

The second is the commercially published game (D 1 C, T. Drake, Fantasy Games Unlimited). The thin board, few counters, and turgid rules are in no way worth the ten dollar price. This is a two-player game using the Diplomacy game-system, which the designer felt was a failure, though some players liked it. The Great Powers are Aquilonia, Stygia, Cimmeria, Turan, and a federation of Ophir, Corinthis, and Koth.

Fantasy Based on Novels

There are six variants based on R.E. Howard's Conan stories, all suffering more or less from the unfavorable configuration of major powers on the Hyborian map.

Hyborian Age II (C 1 C, Burt Labelle) is a simple variant which the designer felt was a failure, though some players liked it. The Great Powers are Aquilonia, Stygia, Cimmeria, Turan, and a federation of Ophir, Corinthis, and Koth.

Homeric Diplomacy (HA V) (C 2 B, Jim Peters with revision by C.F. von Metzke) is essentially a variant for 2-11 players. However, this merely amounts to adding or subtracting players without changing anything else, so most if not all versions are poorly balanced. DW.

A completely satisfactory Conan variant has yet to appear.

Earthsea Diplomacy (B 2 E, Thomas Gallogway) uses the map of the setting for Ursula Le Guin's trilogy. New rules allow greater mobility and versatility for fleets. Published in DW Vol. 1, number 6, now out of print; but available from variant banks.

Other variants:

dalarna I (C 3 D, J. Leeder).
dalarna II (C 3 D, J. Leeder). Both based on Well of the Unicorn, F. Pratt.
Witch World I (E 3 B, J. Robertson). 

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Fantasy Not Based on Any Story

All but one of these are magic-system variants, that is, rules for heroes, wizards, and spells grafted onto the standard Diplomacy board and rules.

The Dying Earth (A 4 B, L. Pulipher) is not related to Jack Vance's famous series. It represents an earth climbing out of the savagery following the exhaustion of many natural resources. Each player (2-11 or more) begins with one army, a hero, and a wizard, all rating he selects. The wizards may find items that permit "building" of more wizards and heroes. A wizard may only know one of the six possible spells, casting only one each turn. The hero adds to the strength of a unit he accompanies. Heroes and wizards have no combat strength alone, and may be in the same space as an army or fleet, VP.

Sword and Sorcery Diplomacy (A 4 B, Scott Rich) uses the usual seven countries and includes many more spells and a different system for determining how many wizards and heroes a player may possess. A king piece is added, DW.

The two variants above resemble each other in some ways because Scott and I started them independently and they helped each other with playing suggestions. It is in any way based on Dungeons and Dragons. If any game is a precedent, it is the old fantasy postal role-playing game Midgard.

Song of the Night (A 2 A, L. Pulipher) uses a new board and an expanded and revised Dying Earth system, and the simplest version. With the addition of exploration, non-human creatures and monsters, and magical treasure, the rating can go up to 5; it is then the most comprehensive and most radical of all fantasy variants. 2-7 may play. In Diplomacy Games and Variants, see below for details.

Other variants:
- Dungeons and Diplomacy I (1, J. Maiden, Unfinished.
- Dungeons and Diplomacy II" (C 5 B, L. Dunning).

Variants Based on SF Novels and Stories

Owing partly to copyright questions, only one variant in this category is readily available, though many exist.

Barsoomian Blitz (Barsoom II) (D 3 B, K. St. Andre).
Kregen (C 2 C, K. St. Andre).
Cities in Flight (A 3 D, T. Galloway).

Miscellaneous SF

Timestrips (A 3 B, L. Pulipher), for any number of players, is based on the paratime/multidimension probability idea (Corridors of Time, Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen, and other novels). Each player begins with the same number of combat units and paratime transmitters, which will all are trying to conquer virgins, high resource worlds with the configuration of our earth, but with different supply center locations in each dimensional copy. Players may move about in a world as usual, or use a transmitter to move to a world adjacent in paratime. VP.

Quantum Space (2 C, T.A. McCloud), for any number of players, is a semiabstract space variant. Each player has a planet of eight spaces and four centers, with two space fleets and two armies. Each planet is surrounded by an "orbit" space. All orbit spaces are adjacent to a hyperspace with an infinite number of positions. To gain centers one must break into an enemy orbit and either land a fleet or convey an army down to the planet. VP.

Other variants:
- There are Aliens among Us* (B 1 E, P. Willey).
- Transmet (C 1 E, P. Willey).

SF Covering a Single Solar System

Lunatic Diplomacy (A 2 C, Thomas Galloway). In this variant a planet divided into several spaces is surrounded by many satellites following one another in set orbits. The orbits intersect in some cases, and space fleets occupying satellites may move from one to another. After every move each satellite moves one place in its orbit, changing many positional relationships among fleets and supply centers. VP.

Other variants:
- Interplanetary (E 5 B, G. Reed).
- Apposition (B 2 A, P. Willey).
- Ecliptic (B 5 A, P. Willey).

SF Covering Many Star-systems

Between Galaxies I (A 4 B, L. Pulipher), for 2-9 players, uses a hexagonal grid with entire galaxies depicted on it. Each galaxy has a supply point value, with five points supporting one fleet. Fleets may move up to three hexes in straight lines only, and cannot end a move in intermediate space. Any number of fleets of one player may occupy a hex. VP.

Between Galaxies II (S 3 B, L. Pulipher), for 2-9 players, uses the same idea as above but in simpler form and with a toroidal board so that there are no corner positions. Only one fleet may occupy a hex, and normal supply centers are used. Published in DW Vol 1, number 4, now out of print, but available from variant banks.

The Star Kings (A 3 B, L. Pulipher), for 5-8 players, also uses a hex grid. There is one fleet per star-system, and players can also obtain fortresses which double as matter transmitters. This permits interesting starting positions with home centers scattered about the board, and supply lines are important. VP.

Other variants:
- Cosmic Diplomacy* (E 2 D. S. Trembly).
- Interstellar Diplomacy I & II* (B 5 A, L. Pulipher).
- Interstellar Diplomacy III* (A 5 B, L. Pulipher).

Cosmic Diplomacy & C S A, L. Dunning.

There are several variants with science fiction titles from which I have no particulars: Space Station I. Interstellar Conquest, and Proxima Centauri.

Availability

"DW" in the lists above refers to Diplomacy World, a magazine devoted entirely to Diplomacy. It is necessary to order an entire issue to obtain the variants section. The magazine is printed in reduced type and the maps tend to be too small to be used with the large wooden Diplomacy pieces, though the covers are satisfactory substitutes. Variants available are:

- Sword and Sorcery Diplomacy (Volume II, number 3).
- War of the Ring (III, 1).
- Hyborian Diplomacy (IV, 1).

Each issue is $1.25 from W. L. Buchanan, Lebanon, Indiana 46052. They are in short supply; if out of print, the variants can be obtained from a variant bank (see below).

A copy of the latest issue of DW costs $1.25 from Jerry Jones, 1854 Wagner St., Pasadena, California 91101.

"VP" above refers to the Science Fiction and Fantasy Variants Package. This is a collection of variants printed in full size photo-offset. Many maps are large enough for the wooden pieces. Included along with the variants listed in this article are two pages of simple SF/F pulp on which can be incorporated into other variants. A copy costs $3.00 postpaid from Lewis Pulipher, 700 Morenre Rd. Apt. C-11, Durham, NC 27705.

Diplomacy Games and Variants is a magazine size 24 page booklet published by Strategy Games, London. Three 17 x 1 1 inch maps are included, as well as introductory information and simple variants to complement the more complex games. Among the latter is Song of the Night, mentioned above. In Britain order from Games Centre, 16 Hanway St., London W1A 2LS. In America order from Lou Zocchi, 0156 Pass Road, Gulfport, MS 39501 for $5.50 postpaid.

"Variant banks" sell copies of many out of print variants at cost of photocopying and postage. In America write Rod Walker, 1273 Crest Dr., Encinitas, CA 92024 (catalog $1.10), or Fred Davis Jr., 1427 Clairidge Rd., Baltimore, MD 21207. In Britain write Andy Tringham, 25 Auckland Rd., London SE19 2DR.

For more information about Diplomacy, either get a copy of the popular Game of Diplomacy World or buy Gamers Guide to Diplomacy, available from the Avalon Hill Company and in game shops.

* * * * *

Great, Lew, but you seem to consistently rate yourself "A" or "B". Does anyone out there have a second opinion?  
-FJ
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I. BACKGROUND DATA

Folklorists are interested in placing data in a social context. All information requested in this section, however, is optional.

1. Name and address.
2. Would you agree to be interviewed personally, or to answer a more extensive questionnaire by mail?
3. Do you object to having your name mentioned in an article about this game?

II. THE GAME

1. How or from whom did you learn about the game?
2. What tricks or ruses did you use to "kill" your victims? Did these tricks really work?
3. What tricks or ruses did assassins use to "kill" you? Did these tricks really work?
4. Did you ask anyone to help you "spot" your victim or assassin?
5. Did you have an organized plan of defense or a method of avoiding assassins?
6. If you were required to use a specific weapon, did you modify it in any way — i.e., to improve range, accuracy, etc.?
7. If someone asked you why you wanted to play this game, what would you tell them?
8. Have you ever heard of this game being played elsewhere on your campus, another campus, or anywhere else? If so, can you supply the names and addresses of persons who played it there as possible interview subjects?
9. Could you briefly outline the rules of the game as you played it? Were there special regulations about the weapon you could use? Were there special regulations about the way many witnesses could observe a kill? How did you get the name of your next victim when you had killed your first one? If you were able to kill your assassin, how did the ring of assassin-victim-assassin close up without your finding out who your new assassin would be?
10. Other comments:

Please write your answers on as many sheets of paper as necessary, and send them to: Professor John W. Johnson
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Indiana University
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Your help is appreciated.

Contest

This month's contest is for killers. We're looking for more science-fiction weapon simulators... safe ways to "kill" somebody in a futuristic manner. Entries should be written up in the form used in the actual KILLER rules. Entries will be judged on the basis of cleverness and originality — but unsafe entries will automatically be disqualified.

All entries will become the property of TSG/SJ Games. First place will win a 12-issue subscription; second place will receive a 6-issue subscription. Winners (and any good runners-up) will also appear in TSG. We reserve the right to award fewer (or no) prizes if no entries of publishable quality are received. Entries must be postmarked no later than October 31, 1981.
Expanded Combat for Traveller

What if my character is hanging upside down from a slow-moving air/raft in a heavy wind on a 2G planet with an exotic atmosphere panic-firing a tripod weapon without the tripod at a 2-foot-tall opponent evading at medium range in a fast-moving ATV at night in a snow storm after being wounded?

The basic Traveller combat system was designed for use with the weaponry and characters of Traveller Book One. When confined to Book One characters and weapons, there are few conflicts. But since the advent of the basic Traveller system, several expansions have been released introducing new weaponry and more highly skilled characters. Mercenary is perhaps the worst offender in this regard. Using its weaponry, particularly gauss rifles and fusion guns, even an unskilled character literally cannot miss shots—eventually, no matter how many shots are fired at the target—while skilled characters created with the Mercenary generation system will have no trouble missing.

In basic Traveller there are only a few negative die modifiers to your to-hit rolls: mainly those for evading and for drawing and firing a weapon in the same round. A few more are added in Snapshot and Azhanti High Lightning, but really not enough to match the almost unbeatable combination of Mercenary weaponry and high skill. To retain some semblance of challenge in Traveller fire fights, the referee may be hard pressed to devise negative modifiers on the spot to reflect the conditions particular to each combat situation.

The problem that often arises is this: Unless he's kept careful record of modifiers used in each particular situation, sooner or later the referee, being human, is going to use a different modifier from the one he's used before in the exact same situation. And of course there'll always be at least one player who will call him on it.

To avoid such conflicts in my Traveller campaign, I've worked out several sets of guidelines to cover the various situations that may crop up during the course of a Traveller session. With the advice and consent of my players, I've formulated a list of standardized combat modifiers to reflect a wide range of conditions under which combat may occur. I've also devised a system of automatic hits and misses, a concept common to most role-playing games, but absent in Traveller. This guarantees that even the most skilled character with the most powerful weapon will miss on occasion—and gives everyone a slight chance at a lucky shot now and then. Adoption of such a set of combat rules should help smooth out just about any Traveller play session.

Combat Die Modifiers

I've divided all my combat DMs—both negative and positive—into four basic areas: Modifiers of movement, of situation, of action, and of condition.

Modifiers of Movement: These are DMs applied to the roll to hit due to movement on the part of either the character who is firing or his target or, in some cases, both. These DMs are all cumulative. i.e., if the person firing and his target are both running, a total DM of -6 is applied to the roll to hit (-3 + -3 = -6). Likewise, if a target is evading in a slow-moving air/raft at medium range, the firer is in a slow-moving ATV, and both are closing range, the total DM is -5 (-2 for evading at medium range, -2 for target flying slowly, no maneuvers, -3 for firing from a slow-moving vehicle, +1 for firer closing range, and +1 for target closing range). This, of course, does not take in account additional modifiers for weapon's range, armor or skill in the weapon, all of which would be added when determining the final roll to hit.

by William A. Barton

Modifiers of Situation: These concern the actual physical condition of either the character firing or his target. These include any type of cover the target may be behind, the firer or target (or both) taking a prone position or being at different altitudes, the firer shooting from different positions or from uncertain footing, and firing from extremes of range, long and short. Many of these will be cumulative, but some will not, i.e., a target under cover may claim only one of the four states of cover, usually at the referee's discretion. Similarly, a character cannot fire at a target at extreme range and at point-blank range at the same time. One can fire at a target at a lower altitude (+1) under soft cover (-1) while prone (+1) during an earthquake (uncertain footing, -3) for a total DM of -2.

Modifiers of Action: These are caused by some action taken on the part of the character firing or by the target. Several of these are taken directly from GDW's own works, such as those for panic firing, snapshots or use of telescopic sights. Others include taking an aimed shot, moving to fire at a target to the rear or side, firing while performing various acrobatics or using psionics to aid targeting, etc. Few of these modifiers are cumulative with each other, most actions precluding any other, but most can be combined with DMs from the other sections (i.e., firing at a stationary target already hit in a previous round while lying prone on a slow-moving vehicle).
Modifiers of Environment: These are dependent on the physical surroundings of the person firing or his target. They include modifiers for firing in adverse weather conditions and in various gravity fields. Familiarity on the part of a character with any of the environmental situations described may negate certain modifiers, especially if the firer is in a very familiar environment, such as that of his home world or a similar planet.

Modifiers of Condition: These are based on conditions such as the lack of skill of a character in a weapon, the size of the target, the physical condition of the firer—wounded, fatigued, intoxicated—and how much load a person firing is carrying. Whether a person is wearing a vest suit or battle dress or is involved in some type of combat fall into this category as well. Some of these DMs are cumulative; some are not. For example, losses of one-half ST, DX and END are cumulative. A character with less than half of each of these would suffer a total DM of -4. The -4 DM for ½ DX loss would supercede the -2 for ½ DX loss. The character would receive an additional -1 DM for having been wounded the previous round. It's not easy to fire accurately when wounded!

For the exact modifiers used in each case, refer to the Combat Modifiers Table. As noted above, I've incorporated all the DMs from the various Traveller books and supplements into my tables for convenience. Those DMs are marked in the table with asterisks (*).

### Automatic Hits

The roll of an unmodified 12 on two dice becomes an automatic hit regardless of the number actually required to hit. The to-hit number does, however, aid in determination of damage to the target, which may range from no hits (an insignificant flesh wound) to death, as follows:

- If the number rolled on two dice needed to hit is 9 or less, the roll of an unmodified 12 is an automatic hit which does double the normal damage as rolled up for the particular weapon being used. For example, a 12 is rolled when firing at a target with a laser carbine. Roll four dice damage as normal. If the roll is a 13, the target takes 26 hits. If the double roll itself does not kill the target, roll one die. On a roll of 1 or 2, a vital spot has been hit (heart, brain, etc.) and the target dies.

- If the number needed to hit is from 10 to 14, an unmodified roll of 12 is an automatic hit which does the regular amount of damage for that weapon. If the damage done by that particular weapon is not enough to kill the target, roll one die. On a roll of 1, a vital spot has been hit and the target dies.

- If the number needed to hit is from 15 to 21, the roll of a 12 equals an automatic hit which does only half damage. Roll damage normally and divide it by two, rounding fractions down. If the result is less than one, it is a scratch and the target takes no damage.

- If the number needed to hit is 22+ (not possible in most cases unless using the modifiers listed in this article), a roll of 12 is an automatic hit causing a maximum

### Table: Automatic Hits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll of 12</th>
<th>To Hit</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Vital Hit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>automatic hit, double damage</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>automatic hit, regular damage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>automatic hit, half damage 4-6</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22+</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>automatic hit, 1-3+1 pt. damage, 4-6+0 damage</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll of 2</th>
<th>To Hit</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Jams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>automatic miss, may jam</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>automatic miss, may jam</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>automatic miss, automatic jam</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>automatic miss, automatic jam, may explode</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Skill: Unjamming Procedure Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Will take 2D6 rounds to unjam weapon, twice that if evading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Will take 1D6 rounds to unjam weapon, twice that if evading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3+</td>
<td>Will take one round to unjam weapon, two rounds if evading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TRAVELLER COMBAT MODIFIERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifiers of Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Target evading — close, short range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing evading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Target sneaking (moving cautiously, making use of cover, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer trotting or jogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target firing slowly (wings, air/raft, gray belt, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing slowly, no maneuvers (as above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer firing fast, no maneuvers (as above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing from slow-moving vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target in slow-moving vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing from fast-moving vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target in fast-moving vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer opening range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target or firer closing range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Modifiers of Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Firing at extreme range</td>
<td>-4 (Modifiers for very long range.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target under cover, mostly exposed</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target under cover, partially exposed</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target under cover, mostly unexposed</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target under cover, totally unexposed</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain footing</td>
<td>-3 (May require DX throw to retain footing.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing at point-blank range</td>
<td>+5 (Must be within 1' of target.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target prone</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing prone (and aiming)</td>
<td>+3 (See aimed shot.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing prone (no aiming)</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target at higher altitude than firer</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target at lower altitude than firer</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target under soft cover (brushes, smoke, etc.)</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing gun from rest, comfortable position (in foxhole, sitting, etc.)</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing gun from rest, awkward position (kneeling, scrunchup, etc.)</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing while upside down</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Modifiers of Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Draw and fire weapon in same round</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire shotgun against flying target</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic fire</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Snapshot</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Cover fire</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning or swinging to fire at target at side</td>
<td>-2 (Counts as snapshot.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning or swinging to fire at target at rear</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing while dropping from one level to the next</td>
<td>-4 (Must throw DX or less, otherwise lose footing and can't fire.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing shoulder weapon one-handed</td>
<td>-3 (Unless DX 13+, then only -1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing hand weapon with wrong hand</td>
<td>-2 (Unless ambidextrous.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimed shot</td>
<td>+2 (Must have spent one round aiming.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing at stationary target, already hit in previous round</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of one point damage. Roll one die. On a roll of 1-3, the target takes 1 hit. On a 4-6 the target receives only a scratch, no damage.

Note that the roll to hit a vital spot causing the death of the target only applies to living beings. If the target is a robot, a vehicle or anything else that is not alive, the roll for death is not made. Similarly, if the damage roll has resulted in the target receiving only a scratch (i.e., less than one point of damage), the roll for a vital hit is not made either. Example: A target is hit with a body pistol which does 3D-8 damage. The number needed to hit was a 6. The roll was a 12 — double damage. A four is rolled on three dice. Even doubling the roll results in only 8 points. The target therefore receives no damage, so the roll for a vital hit is not made.

**Automatic Misses**

The roll of an unmodified 2 on two dice becomes an automatic miss regardless of the number needed to hit. The to-hit number does, however, determine what the consequences, if any, are to the weapon and/or the character firing it, as follows:

- If the number needed to hit on two dice is 1 or less, the roll of an unmodified 2 is an automatic miss. Roll one die. On a roll of 1-3, the weapon has jammed and may not be fired again until unjammed. On a roll of 4-6, the weapon may be fired normally next round.
- If the number needed to hit is from 2 to 7, an unmodified roll of 2 is an automatic miss. On a further roll of 1-4 on one die, the weapon jams. Any other result allows the weapon to fire normally next round.
- If the number needed to hit is from 8 to 12, a roll of 2 unmodified is an automatic miss and the weapon always jams. It may not be fired again during the present combat sequence until unjammed.
- If the number needed to hit is 13+ (i.e., an unmodified roll of 12 is necessary so as to achieve an automatic hit), the roll of a 2 is an automatic miss and the weapon is jammed to such an extent it cannot be uninned at all during the present combat sequence. It will require a person with either electronic or mechanical skill (depending on the weapon) 1D6 hours (minus skill level) to repair the weapon. Furthermore, a second roll must be made immediately upon rolling the 2 on the to-hit roll. This is a one die roll. If a 6 is rolled, rather than jamming, the weapon explodes doing one-half its regular damage to the holder. The weapon cannot be repaired and is useless.

The procedure for unjamming a weapon during the combat sequence is as follows: If the character has no skill in the weapon which has jammed, he cannot unjam it at all within the combat sequence. A character with a skill level of 1 in a weapon which has jammed may unjam it in 2D6 combat rounds. A character with a skill level of 2 in the weapon may unjam it in 1D6 combat rounds. If evading, the number of rounds required to unjam the weapon is doubled for skill levels 1 and 2. If a character has a skill level of 3+ in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire at specific body part</th>
<th>-4</th>
<th>*Using telescopic sight</th>
<th>+4 (At long and very long ranges only.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Firing weapon with folding shoulder stock, folded</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>*Firing pistol weapon with attached shoulder stock - close and short range</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Firing tripod weapon without bipod</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>*Firing while performing acrobatics</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing in familiar environment (planetary stats of diameter, atmosphere same or within 1 factor of home world or world where trained)</td>
<td>+1 (May also negate certain negative modifiers above.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modifiers of Condition**

- No skill in weapon (NPCs and certain character types only)
- Target ½ human size or smaller
- Target twice human size or larger
- Target vehicle size or larger
- Firing under heavy fire
- Firing involved in melee, hand-to-hand
- Firing while fatigued (More than 18 hours without sleep; must sleep at least 6 hours undisturbed to eliminate initial -DM)
- Firing while under stimulants
- Firing while under heavy medication, drugs
- Firing while mildly intoxicated
- Firing while heavily intoxicated
- Firing while seriously ill
- Lost more than ½ DX
- Lost more than ½ ST
- Lost more than ½ EN
- Lost more than ½ DX
- Lost more than ½ ST
- Encumbered up to ½ encumbrance
- Encumbered from ½ to full encumbrance
- Carrying more than twice maximum load

**Modifiers of Environment**

- Firing in darkness without IR or light intensifier goggles, etc.
- Firing in dim or twilight (without aids)
- Firing in rain, snow, etc.
- Firing in heavy rain, snow, etc.
- Firing in medium winds
- Firing in strong winds
- Firing in stormy winds
- Firing in hurricane, tornado, etc.
- Firing in zero-G, no skill
- Firing in zero-G using handheld
- Firing under water (faster or target)
- Firing in dense, toxic or worse atmosphere
- Firing in gravities 2G+ or higher
- Firing in vacuum

Wounded last round
Hand (or arm) firing with wound
Wearing powered battledress

-3 (Additional -1 each extra hour without sleep, rest, or stimulants.)
-3 (-5 if drug a hallucinogen.)
-2 (EN of 13+, -1.)
-4 (EN of 14+, -2.)
-4
-2 (Cumulative)
-1 (Cumulative)
-1 (Cumulative)
-2 (Cumulative)
-2 (Cumulative)
-1
-2
-2
-4 (Military personnel only — anyone else cannot fire.)
-1 (The effects of shock.)
-2 (If using specific hit locations.)
+2 (Not applicable to systems for which battledress is required.)
weapon jammed, it will only take him one round to unjam it, two if evolving.

Note: The concept of automatic missiles may be applied to blade and blinding weapons as well. Simply count a jam, should it occur, as a broken weapon. If the weapon is a bow, the string has broken. Unfortunately, a broken cutlass cannot be unjammed. Such a weapon may be used only as a club; a second broken result renders the weapon totally useless.

**Firearms in Contact with Target**

The final question which this article will address is: “What if I have my shotgun stuck right in his gut and pull the trigger?” According to any strict interpretation of the Traveller combat system, this would count as a shot at close range and in the case of most long firearms (non-pistols) would probably result in a miss.

Unrealistic? Of course. And players have every right to complain about a strict adherence to such an interpretation. To somewhat alleviate such situations, I’ve added the point-blank range modifier to my DM tables. But for the even closer “gun-to-gut” encounters, I use the following procedure:

If a character’s weapon is in contact with its target, the target has been stationary when the weapon was placed into contact, the result of a shot is an automatic hit which will do one extra die of damage to the target than the weapon normally inflicts. However, unless the target was taken completely by surprise (from behind, while asleep, unconscious or tied up) when fired upon, he may attempt to roll one-half of his current DX or less on 2D6. If he succeeds, the shot is resolved as if at point-blank range, target evading. Damage is rolled normally if a hit occurs.

Thus are my additions to the Traveller combat system. May they help you sessions as they have mine. It should be noted, again, especially concerning the combat modifiers, that these rules were devised with Mercenary-type characters and weaponry in mind. While the automatic hits and misses and other rules may work well even with Book One situations, it would probably be best to limit most of the DMs listed for those good of Mercenary free for all, or those situations where Book One characters have gotten hold of such heavy weaponry. And while I’ve tried to cover nearly every situation I could imagine under which combat could occur in the most appropriate manner I could, I’m sure some will want to alter some of my DMs and will manage to think up others I’ve overlooked. Feel free. Half the fun in any role-playing game is adding your own twists.

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The Origins Awards for 1980 were presented at Pacific Origins, July 3, 1981. (The Academy of Adventure Arts & Design was formed in 1981 to conduct the final voting on the Origins Awards, so that the Awards could be ready by the end of the Origins convention and so that various abuses of voting during the convention could be avoided. Membership information for the Academy can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Academy, P.O. Box 656 Wymadotte, MI 48192.) The nominees and winners are as follows:

The H.G. Wells Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Miniatures and Role-Playing

**Best Historical Figure Series, 1980:** RAL PARTHA CONDOTTIERI; also nominated were: Heritage Napoleonics, Hinchcliffe Seven Years War, Mike’s Models’ Ancients, and Minifigs 15mm Napoleonics.

**Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Figure Series, 1980:** RAL PARTHA PERSONALITIES; other nominees were: Grenadier’s AD&D, Heritage Knights & Magic, Martian Metals Traveller, and Minifigs World of Greyhawk.

**Best Vehicular Model Series, 1980:** GHQ MICRO ARMOR; also nominated were: CinC 1/285 armor, Heritage Panzertroops, Martian Metals Ogre series, and Superior Models’ MAATAC.

**Best Miniatures Rules, 1980:** TAC-FORCE (GDW), winning out over Engage & Destroy (Chaosium), Knights & Magic (Heritage), Sea Command (Enola), and WRG Ancients 6th Ed.

**Best Role-Playing Rules, 1980:** DRAGONQUEST (SPI); its competition was: In The Labyrinth (Metagaming), Land of the Rising Sun (FGU), Space Opera (FGU), and Top Secret (TSR).

**Best Role-Playing Adventure, 1980:** TWILIGHTS PEAK (GDW); others nominated were: Duck Tower (Judges Guild), Expedition to the Barrier Peaks (TSR), Keep on the Borderlands (TSR), and Queen of the Demonweb Pits (TSR).

**Best Professional Magazine Covering Miniatures, 1980:** THE COURIER, which bested Campaign, Dragon, Gryphon, Military Modeling, and Wargamer’s Digest.


**All Time Best Pre-Napoleonic Gunpowder Miniatures Rules:** WRG RENAISSANCE RULES; others named were: Cavaliers & Roundheads, Field Regulations (both TSR), Frederick the Great (FGU) and The Wargame (Charles Grant).

**All Time Best Air Combat Miniatures Rules:** BASIC/ADVANCED FIGHTER COMBAT (Zocchi), winning over Air Power (TSR), and Fighter Pilot (Zocchi).

The Charles Roberts Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Boardgaming

**Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame, 1980:** EMPIRES OF THE MIDDLE AGES (SPI), winning over Circus Maximus (AH), Knights of Camelot (TSR), Pea Ridge (SPI), and War & Peace (AH).

**Best 20th Century Boardgame, 1980:** CRESCENDO OF DOOM (AH); also running were: Berlin 85 (SPI), 5th Corps (SPI), Fortress Europa (AH) and Kursk (SPI).

**Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame, 1980:** AZHANTI HIGH LIGHTNING (GDW); others were: Asteroid (GDW), Dark Nebula (GDW), Knights of Camelot (TSR), and Time Tripper (SPI).

**Best Computer Game, 1980:** TEMPLE OF APSHAI (Automated Simulations), which went up against four Avalon Hill titles: B-1 Nuclear Bomber, Midway Campaign, North Atlantic Convoy Raid, and Nukewar.

**Best Initial Release of a Boardgame, 1980:** STREETS OF STALINGRAD (Phoenix), winning over Alaric the Goth (SSG), Raid on Iran (Steve Jackson), Titan (Gorgunstar), and Winter Storm (Vanguard).

**Best Professional Magazine Covering Boardgames, 1980:** FIRE & MOVEMENT; others named were: Ares, The General, Moves, and Strategy & Tactics.

**Best Amateur Magazine Covering the Hobby in General:** HMS REVIEW, winning over Airdrome, Combat Zone, Alarms & Excursions, and Journal of WWII Wargaming.

**Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame Membership:** E. GARY GYGAX.

**Special Combined H.G. Wells and Charles Roberts Award for the Gamer’s Choice of 1980:** ACE OF ACES (Nova).

Origins Releases

New releases at Origins included two science fiction role-playing games. SPI introduced their new Universe (to be reviewed next issue). Lou Zocchi brought out a new edition of his venerable Star Patrol.

Heritage released four small-format games, the first of their projected line of “Dwarfind” games. These are packaged in 4” x 7” cardboard boxes, with color maps and counters. Titles are Star Viking, Demonlord, Barbarian Prince, and Outpost Gamma.

Chaosium announced that their magazine Different Worlds would be going monthly.

Also new at Origins: the first issue of ex-Dragon editor Tim Kask’s new magazine, to be titled Adventure Gaming.

Fantasy Games Unlimited will be going into the miniatures business, producing figures for its Space Opera game. T-Rex Miniatures will continue to do the vehicles; FGU will do other figures.
Nonhuman Races

The Krell

The planet Combe is primarily noteworthy because of the unique phylum, Clornomorphus, which originated there. These are large (80 to 150 meters at full growth) tree-like plants that propagate by “seeds” which are not only mobile, but intelligent.

The adult plant shows no signs of intelligence, but at maturity produces “seeds” which, depending on the genus, have from 4 to 8 appendages and are self directed. The seeds normally remain mobile for periods ranging from 2 to 35 standard years, with some individuals remaining mobile for over 50 standard years.

Three species have developed at least the rudiments of language, the Krell being the most proficient in language and tool use. Krell have 6 limbs, 2 used for locomotion only, 2 digitized at the end and used solely for fine motor skills, and the remaining two (in the center on the trunk) are used for gross motor manipulation and occasionally for locomotion.

The Krell society exists to protect the Krelli trees and their growing spaces (as well as several symbiotic species). They educate the newly released seeds (Krendor) in tool use, language, and duty to the forest.

In times of poor growth many of the Krell will migrate to other areas. This pressure from new growing areas has led to the spread of the Krelli forests to the three neighboring planetary systems.

The psychology of the Krell has attracted some discussion among human scientists. Krell do not die at the end of their life cycle; they grow into Krelli trees. This seems in some ways equivalent to a “death wish,” since by all accounts the Krelli trees are not self-aware. The search for an appropriate location is very high in Krell motivation. The only more powerful motivation yet discovered is the tenacious defense of the Krelli forests by the Krell.

This extreme territorial nature was discovered by the first contact group, the crew of the Vistula. One of the Krelli trees was set afire by the landing boat, and the crew suddenly found themselves facing an organized, disciplined attack.

Krell colonization teams have been reported recently outside of their normal cluster and some military and scientific sources suggest that they plan to establish Krelli forests on less developed planets, eventually displacing the currently dominant life forms.

—John L. Vogel

The Crell

Designed specifically for Space Opera, the Crell are the major power found in both the Libra and Virgo constellations. The empire is over 400,000 light years from end to end, and contains 2,195 known systems to date.

The Crell are most feared for their large roving fleets of battleplanets and starhunters. The battleplanets are similar in design to the Death Star of Star Wars fame. The number of battleplanets encountered will not be less than two, and not less than four if an invasion fleet is encountered. Starhunters are up-gunned cruisers designed for long range fleet action and are often encountered in small fleets of one to six. A fleet will also have one to six agroships per battleplanet, besides one to twenty starhunters.

The Crell are a race of ursinoids originating from three Class G solar systems located in the Votre II sector in the Libra constellation. The race is Tech 10 and is as old as the last remnants of the forerunners. Despite the military city-state appearance, the Crell are a semi-democratic open-structured society. Their social morals are similar to Terrans, leaning towards a more destructive mentality. Despite this the Crell are slightly conditioned to believe that the empire’s interests come first. As would be expected, at least 80% of the population has to have at least four tours of military service (eight years), including females. Due to such a large number of the populace being in the military, robots and conditioned slaves are necessary to perform some, if not all, of the hard labor tasks.

The economy is based on legal tender called a platinum “lubal,” with gold being the most valuable metal. The economy of the four home worlds is that of a rich industrial planet with populations running around 25,000,000,000. It is due to this that conquering of other worlds is necessary to obtain natural resources and pro-
provide colonies to “keep the wheels turning.” The colonies are most important as the Crelle reproduce like rabbits.

Socially, the male is the dominant member, although the female is expected to perform certain tasks normally related to the males. The urinoids themselves appear as heavily proportioned humanoid with hair. They still retain the claws of their ancestors and the brown, black, or white fur also. Males range from 180 cm to 225 cm in height and mass of 100 kg to 220 kg. Females are somewhat smaller than the males, but are still large in proportion to human males. Vision and hearing are similar to human norms. Smell on the other hand is very acute, almost approaching that of a canine. Urinoids are vegetarians, consuming meat on occasion. They have iron-based metabolisms and life expectancy is about 100 years.

**Standard Crelle Trooper**

**Uniform:** CBA with jet black appearance and golden helmet with silver eagle and large tinted visor. Rank is given in a series of red and green strips on helmet backs. Back packs and belts also black.

**Armor:** CBA/SE with helmet and belt screen (sealed).

**Armament:** AMG 10 with type G over/under grenade pistol, target scope and bayonet, force blade, blast pistol. If in vacuum conditions, substitute blast rifle for AMG 10.

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Adventure scenario for use with Space Opera.
FEATURED REVIEW: Aftermath
by William A. Barton

AFTERMATH is Fantasy Games Unlimited’s entry into the growing subgenre of After-the-Holocaust SF RPGs, which includes Timeline’s Morrow Project, TSR’s Gamma World, and that ludicrous abomination, The Realm of Yoth. The basic set consists of three rule books, an introductory scenario, a cardstock character sheet, and a three-sheet fold-out set of cardstock charts that could be used as a ref shield, box. The game includes 223 pages of rules — more than the three previous games combined, and more than 40 pages longer than even FGU’s Space Opera!

AFTERMATH is a very complex game system. More than a role-playing game, it is a role-playing simulation, perhaps more so than any other RPG to date. AFTERMATH designers Paul Hume and Bob Charette seem to have sat down with the idea of covering nearly every possible situation they could think of that might come up in a world in which civilization has crumbled, then to create a system that would cover it. They’ve darn near succeeded, too. The designer’s notes say that AFTERMATH was more than two years in the making; I can well believe it. The game was originally to be released by Phoenix Games, then was bought by FGU when Phoenix apparently went under (the FGU label on the cover of the box is a sticker; I would assume this is to cover the Phoenix logo), yet if I didn’t know better I’d have sworn that it was designed from the start with FGU’s penchant for complexity in mind.

Among the various details covered in AFTERMATH are the complexities of riding horses, splash effects of thrown acid, various types of poisons and gases and their effects, the shades of difference between a certain skill used in an urban environment — and dozens of other minutiae that most systems either leave to the gamemaster to devise or handle briefly with a few guidelines. Whereas Gamma World handles poisons and the characters’ resistance to them in a single chart, AFTERMATH goes into such subtleties as the poison’s vector (aerosol, subcutaneous, gastric or dermal), its “incubation period,” its strength and type (lethal, narcotic or depressant), its cycle time, crisis and side effects, even a formula for “encoding” poisons. The diseases of biowarfare are covered in even greater detail than in The Morrow Project, as is the development and use of psionic powers among the survivors — a subject TMP failed to cover properly.

AFTERMATH does miss a few bases in its quest for completeness — weather isn’t covered at all except under phenomena on the encounter tables, computer technology is slighted somewhat, as is the construction and handling of conventional robots — but it doesn’t miss many. It may not have the exhaustive lists of animals and mutants of TMP or GW, but it does include some animals usually not found outside FRPGs — elephants, rhinos, giant cockroaches and even sharks! The only mutant animal listed as a “regular” in AFTERMATH is the Master Rat, an intelligent rodent that may eventually rival man for the remnants of Earth, as in Andre Norton’s Star Man’s Son. There’s even a section on intelligent ape characters — chimps, gorillas and orangutans — in case the gamemaster wishes to recreate the Planet of the Apes.

Equipment lists in AFTERMATH, like nearly everything else, are extensive — not so much as in Space Opera, but more so than even TMP, especially the firearms, which I’ll discuss in a moment. Equipment is grouped into utility numbers from 0 (signifying low utility, poor or low-tech equipment) to 5 (high utility, high-tech items). For example, a club or a ruined musket would be a utility 1 weapon while a laser rifle would be utility 5. Equipment is also rated by its barter value, barter being the only economic system used in the game.

Those who thought the weapons list overly long and detailed and the combat system complicated in The Morrow Project should take a look at AFTERMATH. The section on firearms and explosives alone is 26 pages long — and that’s not counting the section on muscle-powered and hand-to-hand weapons, including weapons usually relegated to fantasy games, such as blowguns, shurikens and nunchaku, and the section on lasers, nukes, flamethrowers and other exotics. In addition, there is a list of almost 200 different firearms in the back, in case players want to use even more detail. Pages and pages of the three rule books are devoted to such details as types of magazines, ammo, grenades, etc.; black powder “cook-offs”; armor penetration values; gas and burn effects; methods of reloading weapons; blast patterns for grenades, claymore mines, shotguns, etc.; hip fire, recoil, laser trauma — you name it, it can be found somewhere in AFTERMATH.

Most of the basic combat rules are located in Book 1, along with the explanations of “detailed action time” (one of five time scales used in AFTERMATH), in which combat occurs, and rules for movement and action performance, both of which are required prerequisites to understanding combat. These rules cover the likes of hit locations for bipeds and quadrupeds; various types of damage possible (lethal, subdual, crushing or combination); critical hits and misses; combat on a moving vehicle, on horseback or on water; and other basics that the later rules build upon. Examples are given of how characters may face opponents on the time display, how they can use skills and/or raw talents to increase their chances to hit or miss a target, how armor works — believe me, there’s a lot here! And it’s all detailed. There’s even a two-page “combat procedure flowchart” in the basic rules book! Now, personally, I think there has to be something wrong with a combat system that requires a two-page flowchart to properly conduct an action as simple as firing a gun at someone. If you disagree, AFTERMATH is definitely your game.

Checking through the combat system, one might pick out two main problems with AFTERMATH. One is organization. While AFTERMATH isn’t the hodgepodge Space Opera is, the organization still leaves something to be desired. The various rules covering weapons and combat are spread throughout the three rule books. Other subjects are treated similarly. While the basic rules in Book 1 explain the abilities, attributes, talents, skills, etc., of characters, the method for generating characters isn’t given until Book 2. As a result, to ful-
ly understand how to create an AFTERMATH character requires leafing back and forth constantly from one book to the next. A lot of information that players might need to know in a game is placed in the "forbidden-to-players" gamemaster's guide. A player with a skill in laser technology, for example, will be able to learn what his character would know only by reading the GM guide, unless the GM gives him the information. In several places, too, terms and abbreviations are used quite freely pages before they are even explained.

This ties in with AFTERMATH's second flaw: its excessive detail, calculations and abbreviations. In several places I had to read and reread a section to figure out exactly what was meant — and then only managed by reading an example. Without the examples, much of the basic rules sections might as well be written in Swahili.

The rules lack clarity in places and will take work to understand fully. The authors seem to be particularly enchanted with initials, too. Characters have BCs, DRTs, CDAs and BMAs, make ASs and CSTs, use weapons with BDGs or WDMs, all the while moving in DAT! Trying to keep track of what all of them stand for is enough to make one feel DOA. Overall, I'd recommend you find a detail-minded GM who has spent a lot of time learning the rules so he can teach them to you — or at least help you understand them.

In spite of its excessive complexity, AFTERMATH has its admirable points. Aside from the long lists of equipment and weapons, the skills are quite diverse and include such uncommon but useful ones as Architecture, Tailor, Farming and Culture, as well as the obligatory combat and technology skills. One might note, too, that AFTERMATH is the first game of its kind to provide skills for characters at all.

AFTERMATH's character generation is closer to that of Superhero 2044 than anything else. Players are given 75 points to divide among six attributes: wit, will, strength, dexterity, speed and health. Characters also have scores in seven talent areas, determined in part by the character's psychological profile (rolled for on one of AFTERMATH's many tables). The talent areas are charismatic, combative, communicative, esthetic, mechanical, natural and scientific. The attribute and talent scores will help a player choose skills for his character and will govern the character's initial score in each skill. Characters must also determine their age groups, origins, physical characteristics, encumbrance capacity, basic clothing, initial armor and equipment and choose their skills, among other things. It sounds like a lot to do — and it is — but if a player follows the example given, character generation will prove to be one of the easier aspects of the game. The only problem may come in determining encumbrance. The formula given in the rules and that in the example are contradictory. And neither formula gives the results used in the example to show the difference between unencumbered and partially encumbered. So until FGI issues Errata, you'll have to use whichever formula you prefer.

The single aspect of AFTERMATH which may make it very attractive is the open-endedness of its background. Unlike TMP and Gamma World, the world in which AFTERMATH is played is entirely up to the GM. If you want a world ravaged by a nuclear war, so be it. If you prefer natural disaster, it's yours for the making. Your personal aftermath can be set 20 years or 200 years after the holocaust — whatever it may have been. Suggestions are given for certain methods of worldwide disaster to spark the GMs imagination: a new ice age, total or limited war, cometary collisions a la Lucifer's Hammer, Earth's slipping into another dimension where magic works and mythical beasts still live, alien invasions (one of the most interesting ideas in this line is that of H.G. Wells' Martians returning and winning this time).

It wouldn't be too difficult to integrate a Morrow Project scenario into an AFTERMATH campaign — or vice versa. And the Bolt People campaign mentioned as a possibility is little more than a Gamma World scenario without the futuristic weapons and wild mutants. Thus, AFTERMATH could even be used as a sourcebook to fill out places where the rules of either of those two systems are a little sparse. This could perhaps be AFTERMATH's greatest attraction for those who enjoy role-playing games rather than role-playing simulations.

There's a lot more I could say about AFTERMATH, both negative and positive, but space restrictions forbid it. So I'll leave it at this: If your taste in RPGs tends toward simplicity or to systems that are easily playable without a lot of work, you'll surely want to pass up AFTERMATH, and stick to Gamma World or The Morrow Project. If you thrive on complexity, countless calculations and mounds of information, AFTERMATH will give you that — and more.

AFTERMATH is designed by Paul Hume and Bob Charrette and is published by Fantasy Games Unlimited. It retails for $20.00, which includes the three rule books, introductory scenario with cut-out counters, charts, a questionnaire and game box. Published 1981.

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CHAMPIONS (Hero Games, 702 Laurel Wood Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403); $9.95. Designed by George MacDonald and Steve Peterson. One 8½" x 11" rulebook. Two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

This is another in the ranks of superhero role-playing games. Players create, through point-allocation, the characters they want, and usually exceed their allotted points by picking up superhuman advantages.

More so than many role-playing games on the market, and certainly more so than Villains & Vigilantes or Superhero 2044, CHAMPIONS succeeds in what it is trying to do. The characters, assembled with their multifold powers and disadvantages, the combat, with its spectacular effects, and the sheer coherence and playability of the whole game system render this a very good game. After one reading of the rules, a player can create a decent character and will have a fair grasp of the combat. The character record sheet has not only ample room for all the noted characteristics, it also contains a chart to aid in determining secondary characteristics, another giving modifiers for various combat options, and also a half-complete picture of a character — simply ink in the appropriate costume motifs, color, and you have the character before you, in all his (or her) glory. (There are eight character record sheets, each with a different picture.)

There are a few nits to pick. A xeroxable judge's shield would have been nice; so would a page of character record sheets for normal NPCs and dependents. A sample adventure, to aid the prospective referee assemble future ones, would have been in keeping with the book's utility. There is nothing on "extracurricular" characteristics of the superheroes — there is no way to determine professional skills or wealth, for example. In the comics, Dr. Mid-Nite can use his medical skills to aid a badly wounded comrade, but in CHAMPIONS the injured soul must be rushed to a hospital, as there is no way for characters to be doctors. There is no way to see if the character is a playboy millionnaire or a struggling science student. In short, within the scope of the rules, you can create Iron Man, but not Tony Stark, the Huntsman but not Helena Wayne.

These flaws can be overcome with some thought and work, which leaves the buyer with a fine game. If the subject matter interests you, I'd wholeheartedly recommend this product.

— Aaron Altton

THE HAMMER OF THOR (Nova Game Designs); $18.95. Designed by Joe Angelillo. Contains one 16" x 21" poster-like map, 16-page rulebook, 19 card decks (600+ cards) and two reference sheets. The current edition has a corrected map and an errata sheet. Two or more players; playing time 4 hours up. Published 1980.

The object of the game is to be victorious at Ragnarok, the final battle. Each player is designated good, evil, or neutral and then picks a figure from Norse mythology as his hero. Heroes roam about trying to get followers, find useful items and runes, and build up reputation points (given for killing enemies). When heroes run into some one — generally a random NPC they have an encounter. Heroes can choose to fight, to make friends, or to seduce. Usually the Ragnarok card turns up, whereupon good and evil line up for the final battle. The player on the victorious side of Ragnarok who has the most reputation points wins the game.

HAMMER is certainly complete. The 600+ cards include every mythical character (from Thor himself to Audhumla the Original Cow) plus every magical gadget or dwarfish artifact ever mentioned in legend. On top of this, HAMMER has enough components to be played by any number of players. Each player is on his own quest, seldom running into other heroes. Players interact only when they run the random NPCs other players meet.

HAMMER's tragic flaw is its rules. I can't figure out weapon use — the rules seem to indicate that weapons are used only as leaders, but only if they are attacking but not defending. In that case, this game has a lot of weapons that will never be used. Other rules are vague: do I lose control of a dead character? The errata sheet, trying to correct a question about how many followers a leader must have, only garbles the matter further. There are also minor quibbles about accuracy: The map doesn't match the myths, the fire giants have all but vanished, the valkyries won't obey Odin. There is too much paperwork. There is no explanatory material (who are the Alfurs?). Lastly, the game, with small armies and their heroes marching along, isn't much like Norse mythology (even with all the completeness of every character and item from legend, the truth is that you can't use any item the way it was used in the myths).

HAMMER OF THOR is a labor of love on the part of its designer. Too bad Nova didn't assign him a developer. The game is not playable as published, nor are any simple fixes going to help — I recommend HAMMER only to Norse mythology freaks who want to rewrite major sections of the rulebook.

— W. G. Aarmintooth

L.C.B.M. (Mayfair Games, Inc., P.O. Box 733, Chicago, IL 60625); $5.00. Designed by Neil Zimmer. One 8-page rule booklet, 17" x 21" map, 105 die-cut counters, bagged. For two players; playing time 30-45 minutes. Published 1981.

For those Ultimatum enthusiasts who don't always have time for an all-out game of nuclear destruction and retaliation (or who just like to get down to the business of pushing the red button minus the niceties of negotiation, et cetera), Mayfair Games offers L.C.B.M., one of the initial releases in its line of simple, quick-to-play simulations. L.C.B.M. is nuclear war stripped to the bare necessities — intercontinental nuclear missiles and ABMs. The map is a polar projection showing the U.S. and North America, with major cities and their values. The counters show various strength U.S. and Russian missiles on one side, mushroom clouds on the other. The rules are brief, easy-to-understand and clean. Everything that's needed for a half-hour final war — from first strike to massive retaliation — is here.
The graphics of I.C.B.M. are especially nice. The map is colorful yet not gaudy – more pleasing than many that come with lower-priced games such as this. The counters, while a bit thin, are quite sufficient, with remarkably few cutting errors – a problem usually found in products by even the biggest companies. The game is quick and simple to play; most games won’t last much longer than the amount of time used to set up in the first place. Since missiles have a life of only four turns, it’s conceivable most will either be on their way to target or will have been knocked out by your opponent’s early waves before the first wave’s time is up. Great for breaks between long sessions of other games.

While the rules are generally clear, they are a bit sketchy in a couple spots; the charts printed on the game map aren’t adequately explained, for example. This shouldn’t bother experienced gamers, but it might be a problem for newcomers. The game’s simplicity may cause old hands at this sort of game to tire of it after a few playings, too, unless they add their own variants to the optional rules mentioned at the end. In fact, I recommend that experienced gamers incorporate at least the rule on hidden ABMs as soon as they get the hang of the game. The rule that all missiles from one base must be launched at the same time or the remainder is lost is less than satisfying, but this is a picky complaint and the rule is easily changed.

Overall, though, I.C.B.M. is an impressive first offering for a new small company and a good beginning-level simulation for those who like to reduce their opponents to so much nuclear dust.

— William A. Barton

The sword and the Stars (SPI); $12.00. Designed by Eric Smith, boxed with 17” x 22” map, 24-page rulebook, 56 cards, 400 counters, dice, 1-5 players; playing time 2 hours up. Published 1980.

Based on the same system as SPI’s successful Empires of the Middle Ages, this game portrays empire-building among the stars. Those who haven’t seen Empires will be surprised to find that all of the counters in the game are game function markers, and that running one’s own empire is as important as ruining the others. Play consists of a series of “operations” by which one expands or improves one’s empire, or attacks another empire. In multiplayer scenarios, players may make or break deals, bribe each other, and even vote on the fate of a player. Unlike some such games, THE SWORD AND THE STARS contains rules about how to make deals, and what to do if they are broken, rather than just letting the players make use of their own personal pressures. Personal pressure, of course, remains as an element of the game.

Those who have seen Empires will find that THE SWORD AND THE STARS is almost but not quite congruent to the older game. The confederation, race, philosophy, gardian weps, and tech level correspond to the church, religion, language, fortifications and social status. However, new features are included. Distance can affect one’s ability to perform an operation, but starbases may be built to avoid such attenuation. More importantly, the players vote, during the last few turns, on whether to stop the game. This feature prevents a player from using the last turn to take far more territory than he can hold, or to break a deal without fear of the consequences.

—I’d recommend THE SWORD AND THE STARS to any die-hard Empire’s of the Middle Ages player, to anybody who wants a less expensive alternative to that game, and to people who play SF but not historical games. The game system is great; only the historical appeal of the older game is lacking.

—Brian McCue

Thieves’ Guild (Gamelords Ltd.); $9.95. Written by Richard Meyer and Kerry Lloyd. 120 page 8¼” x 11” rulebook. Published 1980.

The theft has been the most neglected character type in fantasy role-playing games. Although D&D, for example, includes a thief class, the adventures toward which AD&D is geared are unsuitable for thievish abilities. One seldom encounters a game master who has arranged adventures specifically for thieves. The THIEVES’ GUILD series provides information and scenarios for GMs who haven’t had the time (or knowledge) to work up adventures for thieves only.

According to prefatory material, TG was computer-typed and offset printed, but it looks like reduced dot matrix printed on a good mimeo – in other words, it’s hard to read. The pages are punched with three holes to be stored in a binder, allowing material from TG II and III to be inserted in the proper places.

TG can be reviewed from two perspectives, first as a self-contained game, second as a supplement to popular role-playing games. As a self-contained game, TG lacks many details (such as rules for magicians, though spells are included) and is unlikely to be intelligible to someone not familiar with wargames. The game offers more to D&D than to any other system, but there are quite a few changes: for ex-

The sun hangs low on the horizon illuminating the ruins of civilization with a bloody light. Is it the sunset of the earth or the sunrise of a brave new world? You can decide as you boldly stride the rubble strewn streets of the

**Aftermath!**

The Game is for 2 to 6 players and a referee in search of a different kind of adventure. It is a role-playing excursion into a post-holocaust world.

**Aftermath! contains:**

- Basic Rules book with multiple examples and illustrations of play.
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**Aftermath! provides a solid basic play mechanic that has been over 2 years in playtesting. Rules are provided for modern firearms, NBC weapons and protection, mutations, survival, high technology and more. The game is structured to allow the referee to decide the nature of the holocaust and the state of the world in which play will occur. Aftermath! is a step forward in the art of role-playing games.**

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ample, a non-adventurer averages around 15 hits to kill. Only thief characters are fully described, including skills which might be learned (such as glassblowing) and some shrewd abilities additional to those of AD&D. GMs of other fantasy games might want to add some of these skills to their lists. The combat system is a sensible modification of the D&D style which eliminates combat combat.

Considering TG as a supplement, many sections of the rules can be applied directly to other games, such as the rules for rations, disguise, "fenses", and disposition of prisoners. The scenarios really cannot be intended to be used with TG characters, but it's not disguised D&D. A method of converting characters from D&D, C&G, PNQuest, and T&T to TG is provided. To use the scenarios without conversion of players, the GM must, at least, make some changes in hit points of persons and divide the value of their treasures by ten to get amounts reasonable for other games. The scenarios, which occupy about two-thirds of the book, include travel for high-value goods to rob, two stores to barge, and one group of couriers (in town) to waylay. There are no dungeons as such, but the jungle and our scenarios include maps of buildings and of the surrounding streets and establishments.

As a separate game TG is reasonably interesting, but few veteran gamers will want to change from their own rules, and few novices would understand it. As a set of scenarios and rule suggestions, TG is better than much Judges Guild material, and even at $9.95 it offers much for your dollar as the "official" modules published by the major companies, provided you are interested in thieves and you don't mind poor writing. In fact, if you like thieves, or want to give them more scope in your game, buy TG before you buy any other supplement. - Lewis Pulipher

TIME TUNNELS

Time Tunnels is a game involving tremendous speeds and a lot of action. Fleets of ships may be built one minute, and possibly destroyed the next. The goal of every Supreme Commander is having control over all of the planetary systems.

Time Tunnels is an unusual game involving the use of black holes, space mines, and time tunnels. Energy crystal production is also an important asset to this game. Time tunnels are created - invisible gateways between planetary systems.

Time Tunnels uses a unique hidden movement system. It is a 2-4 player tactical game, using 224 counters. Each player is the Supreme Commander of his own alien race.

Price: $4.50

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Death and Destruction - price: $5

SUPPLEMENTS

DAGON's DUNGEON, 2nd Ed. (FBI); $3.95. Designed by Bill Hart and Michael Stockwell. Solo adventure for T&T. One 40-page book. One player, playing time 1 hour. Published 1981.

This is a remake of a solo dungeon published in 1977. Up to three humans characters are available, with combat adds totaling 90 or less. Magic is allowed: players are referred to a "magic matrix" (which is quickly becoming a standard feature of FBI solo dungeomas). The new edition has little in common with the old, and almost every change is an improvement. The adventure is far more complete, playable, and better-looking than before.

This is a number of irritating errors in the text. The balance is better than before, but some options still mean sudden death, and others would challenge far more powerful characters than the rules allow.

If you enjoy pointless solo dungeons, this is a fine one.

- Forrest Johnson

GRIMTOOTH'S TRAPS (FBI); $9.95. Edited by Paul Ryan O'Connor. Supplement to FBI. One 8½" x 11" 54-page booklet. Published 1981.

This is a marvelous collection of dungeon party-killers, evidently the best selections from numerous FBD contributors.

GRIMTOOTH'S is a marvel for the merciless GM. Presented are 101 traps - room, corridor, treasures, miscellaneous items, and the dread 101st Trap. Many traps are magical; most are mechanical, and really quite a clever. A lot of experience went into this collection; if nothing else, this supplement shows that a lot of people out there really do like blood. Better than the Handbook of Traps and Tricks (reviewed this issue), GRIMTOOTH'S is clearly and neatly presented, commendably concise, and even instructive.

It is also really deadly, which is its major drawback. Most of these traps are designed to kill; diversionary or confusing tricks are few. Some should be used only if the GM truly wants a decided party to end up as much. I'd recommend this as one of the best supplements released this year - but use it sparingly, unless you have several Indiana Joneses in the party.

- Aaron Allston

HANDBOOK OF TRAPS AND TRICKS (Dragon Tree); $9.50. Edited by Ben Ezell. Supplement for many FRPGs. One 8½" x 11" 100-page booklet. Published 1981.

As the title suggests, this is a compendium of mostly dungeon-style traps - traps in passages, stashed rooms, hidden rooms, portcullises, and so on, magical or mechanical or both. It's a pretty good selection. Traps vary from the amusing to the horrifying, and any GM can find useful items here. A GM using too many of these in one sitting will probably end up with a party of frustrated and bored adventurers, however.

The pack is so nicely structured overall that it wouldn't take much to use the basic situation, changing specific details, etc., to fit it into another game system. Several of the situations would prove quite challenging to a Master of the Wooden Room team, for instance.

Most of the problems with INTO THE RUINS are minor: typos, a couple missing values - nothing really serious. The choice of dark gray for the inner city on the main map was unfortunate; it tends to blend into black places, obscuring names and roads. And the roads and pavements seem to have been left off the area map of the warehouse the adventurers have to reconnoiter. Some sticklers for extreme realism may object to the Zoombas, but actually they're more realistic than many mutts in other such games. The only real lack here is information about the other two communities in the city - the academic community and the eastern coalition - which could cause the GM some effort to create if the players decide to visit either of these (and hair-pulling if FGU later releases the back cover of this book).

Overall, INTO THE RUINS is well-done and should add greatly to any Aftermath campaign.

- William A. Barton


OPERATION: RAPIDSTRIKE! is the second module written for TSR's espionage role-playing game, Top Secret, the first being Spreeenthlandstelle, which was included in the rulebook. In OPERATION: RAPIDSTRIKE!, six agents infiltrate the island fortress of the villainess, Mademoiselle Larreau. Larreau plans to flood the world using a market goods, and destroy the deadly hallucinogenic Zucor, using this to further her plans of world domination. The players' mission: destroy the stockpile of Zucor on the island, capture or kill Mme. Larreau, and rescue the professor she kidnapped to help her produce the drug.

This is pure James Bond stuff, and if you like Top Secret, you will want this module. It is chock-full of useful ideas for the referee and is a fine example of a well-made adventure for
game. A good referee can make this module really exciting, especially if he introduces a time limit for the completion of the mission. The organization, clarity, and presentation are all up to the usual high TSR standards.

Unfortunately, the module is not particularly flexible, as Sprechereinstellung certainly was. This is a one-shot, one mission adventure that does not lend itself well to expansion. Play will also eventually evolve into one continuous armed conflict as the alarm sounds and guards pour forth to do battle. The referee should know Top Secret's involved combat system very well, to run the module effectively.

OPERATION: RAPIDSTRIKE is highly recommended to all administrators. It is an exciting and worthwhile adventure. Hopefully, TSR will produce many more of these non-D&D modules.

— Matt Lussenhop

SORAG (Paranoia Press); $3.50. Designed by Chuck Kaltenbach II. Approved for use with Traveller, One 5¼" x 8¼" 26-page booklet. Published 1981.

Issue one of High Passage gave the Imperium a secret service, the Ministry of Justice Special Branch. Now Paranoia has supplied the JSB's Zhodani counterpart, SORAG, the Scientific, Operations, Research and Administration Group - the intelligence and counter-intelligence agency of the Zhodani Consulate. SORAG contains complete character generation tables for creating characters of the four branches of the secret service, security clearance codes, new skills for SORAG agents and new weapons and equipment, including a list of new drugs available to SORAG operatives and to anyone who can find them. Several new vehicles are presented for intelligence work, such as a miniature submarine, intruder shuttle, infiltrator aircraft and automaton. A wide range of skills may be learned by SORAG personnel, from combat skills - such as the use of special weapons, including the garrote, throwing knives and grenade pistols - to such diverse skills as investigation, psychological warfare, escape and evasion, poison and antidotes, disguise, counterfeiting, and even torture (shudder).

There are several interesting new ideas in SORAG. For one, on the assignment table, a character has to have a certain level of security clearance - from A, sensitive, to E, top secret - in order to accept the assignment rolled up. If the assignment requires a higher clearance than the character has at that time, he must serve an alternate assignment instead. All special assignments are worked right into the specific assignment table, doing away with the necessity for a general assignment table altogether. Characters have a chance each assignment to raise their security clearance, allowing them to accept more exciting (and dangerous) assignments.

Aside from a couple of minor typos, there are few problems evident in SORAG. Some might easily complain that the roll needed to advance in security clearance is too high, causing agents to spend a lot of time in dull alternate assignments (clerical, recruiting), but then, that situation probably reflects the realism of a secret service. Another possible problem is that it is sometimes difficult to obtain the 2+ levels of the skills needed for +DMs on the assignment resolution table (especially weapon skills for survival purposes).

Unless the idea of Zhodani intelligence agents waiting around every corner for your hapless characters turns you off, you should find SORAG an intriguing addition to the Traveller myths.

— William A. Barton

THIEVES' GUILD II (Gamelords Ltd.); $3.95. Written by Richard Meyer, 60-page 8¼" x 11" rulebook. Published 1981.

THIEVES' GUILD II is the second in a series of three booklets of FRP rules and scenarios for thieves. It includes combat rule additions for the TG system, several interesting and (mostly) believable tomb-robbing adventure scenarios, and highwaymen adventures. This volume looks professionally typeset and printed, unlike TG I. As in the first book, the art is OK but not of a full-time professional standard.

TG II does not stand alone if you want to use the intended game system. For that you need TG I (sufficient but incomplete) or the full Fantasy System scheduled for publication this summer. TG II scenarios can be used for other FRP games, however. The tombs are heavily trapped; they tend to be all-or-nothing, especially if the thieves are lucky enough to find and use the device which disarms all the traps. The rewards, too, tend to be excessive from the point of view of other games. (Six and a half million gold pieces in one dragon's hoard? Then again, the dragon has over 600 hit points, and the players are not supposed to have any way to defeat him). Maps of the tombs are included. The remainder of the booklet is a description of highway travelers, as in TG I.

At this price I suggest you look at a copy before you decide whether to buy it. It is a useful addition to TG, but certainly not indispensable.

— Lewis Fulfether

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WEAPONS (Turtle Press, 11834 Caradonna, Warren, MI 48093); $4.00. Written by Matthew Balent, 512 x 8 1/2" 30-page booklet. Published 1981.

WEAPONS is "an illustrated compendium of arms suitable for use in medieval fantasy role-playing games," which means virtually every edged or impact melee weapon used in any medieval or primitive culture. Each of the approximately 600 entries includes a small illustration, and shows size as well as shape, weapon type, length, mass, types of attacks, and relative speed, damage, parry capability, and efficiency as a throwing weapon. The relative values are indicated by numbers from 0 to 4.

The drawings are occasionally shaky; the weapons begin to look the same after a while. The bibliography includes 17 books, but one may question some research decisions: why give a bastard sword and broadsword identical values except for length and mass, while the Scottish claymore and German zweihand have quite different values although both are essentially the same weapon? Is it likely that a zweihander weighs nearly twice as much as a 61/2 meter pike? However, let the experts quibble over such details. What is more important is that some miss. There is too little information about too many weapons, leaving out such important details as how much room is required to use a weapon, whether one or two hands are required, and whether the weapon requires an unusual combat style. Can just any fighter, say one wearing plate, use a Japanese katana effectively? I'm not sure, but you won't find the answer here. To adapt any of these weapons to any game you have to look then up in a weapons reference work to try to find these indispensable details. Thanks to an index, WEAPONS is a quick-reference work, but even in that role there are limitations. A question which plagues D&Ders is "what is a morningstar?" It's not listed in the index! The index only lists weapon type, not page number - you must still search for the relevant section, and sections aren't in alphabetical order.

In my view there is no need to add weapons to those already in most FRPG; but if you must, you'll need to look them up in a good source to get some detail. Ten times as much information about a tenth as many weapons, presented professionally, would have been much more useful. In short, WEAPONS is virtually useless.

Lewis Pulipher

PLAY AIDS


If you've ever wondered, while embroiled in a far-flung Traveller campaign somewhere in the Imperium or beyond, just what type of facilities were offered at the starport on the next planet, Judges Guild has the book for you. FIFTY STARBASSES provides charts, tables and descriptions enough to flesh out even the sketchiest of landing spots on the remotest - or most advanced - worlds in your Traveller universe. Fifteen pages of data outline the different services, equipment and personnel likely to be found at various types of starports. This includes new information on survey beacons, berthing fees, refueling methods, available planetary transportation, cargo handling, orbital facilities, and starport working craft - shuttles, tugs, rescue tugs and rescue missiles. There are also starport generation tables, cargo tables and lists of technical degrees and certificates for starport personnel. The remaining 79 pages consist of mapped starports, laid out on the small-hex-within-a-large-hex grid style of the Guild's fantasy mapping systems, with pages for keyed information on facilities.

FIFTY STARBASSES will aid Traveller referees in making their starports seem more like real places for adventure rather than merely starting and departure points for scenarios. The generation tables, if used with the recommend-
ed judgment and discretion, should prove quite handy, especially when the referee is called upon to create on the spot with little or no preparation.

The real failing in FIFTY STARBASSES, though, is in the pre-mapped starports. While some of them are well-conceived and seem just ready for an imaginative ref to key in what each structure represents, most of them consist of a lot of cryptic geometric shapes with unknown "textures" that I defy anyone to match up with any terrain key. The book could have easily been cut in half and no one would miss these extra "starports." It seems not as much care was put into this book as with, say, the recent Glimmerdrift Reaches. Rather than typeset copy, the text here is obviously shot from a typewritten manuscript, giving it a sloppy, ragged-edge look.

I'm afraid I must give FIFTY STARBASSES a qualified recommendation. The information section on starports is quite useful, as will be some of the maps, if you don't mind paying six books for the package and being able to use less than half the book, pick up a copy.

-William A. Barton

NAVIGATOR'S STARCHARTS (Judges Guild); $4.98. Approved for use with Traveller. One 8½" x 11" 112-page book. Published 1981.

If you're a Traveller referee whose favorite part of the game is mapping out new star sectors for your players to explore, yet you don't have easy access to a copy machine, Judges Guild's new-approved-for-Traveller play aid, NAVIGATOR'S STARCHARTS, should prove quite a useful addition to your game supplies. STARCHARTS contains enough blank maps to record six complete sectors of 16 subsectors each, enough to keep a Traveller group busy for some time. In addition to the subsector maps, six sector maps initiate each six-subsector section to enable one to see at a glance the relationships of each subsector to its neighbors. The sector maps are backed with symbols for amber and red zones, gas giants, starports, naval and scout bases, asteroids and the presence or lack of water. STARCHARTS uses the same format as JG's Lay and Glimmerdrift sectors, sector guidebooks, maps on the right side, room for planetary data on the left. A sample from Glimmerdrift is included on the back cover to aid those unfamiliar with the mapping system.

NAVIGATOR'S STARCHARTS will be appreciated by any ref who has had to leaf through sheets of loose maps to find any particular subsector in his game or who finds the necessity to photocopy maps from other Guild and GDW Traveller supplements too inconvenient or costly. The small sector maps are especially nice, eliminating the need to draw your own on hexpaper and making travel between subsectors easier to manage.

The book would be more useful - and far easier to use - if each page were individually numbered, however. Judges Guild's star symbols are a bit of a pain to try to draw. I recommend using GDW's simpler circles over JG's starpointed stars. Another annoyance is that the print is so close to the margins, some of it is cut off in the center of the book. The pages themselves are printed in a blue ink that some copiers don't pick up well - if at all.

Still, NAVIGATOR'S STARCHARTS will save you considerable time and expense (unless you have a source of cheap copystarts) in your excursions into stellar cartography.

-William A. Barton

If you're a devotee of Superior Models' Starfleet Wars miniature rules and corresponding starship miniatures, you may be aware of STARSHIPS, an "Observer's Directory & Identification Manual." STARSHIPS is an identification manual of some of the newer Superior starship miniatures, though more than a third of its pages are actually devoted to the races that man the ships in Superior's universe. The only ships covered, however, prove to be the new, expensive, not-so-miniature Super Galactic Dreadnoughts and their attendant fighter craft. A chart on the back page does give some new technical information on other new ships, along with a largely unexplained firing table and a note that "possession of this manual gives the player...the right to add 5% to all...die rolls."

Though it is far too limited in scope, the ideas behind STARSHIPS is sound; it is somewhat of a pain to try to keep track of all those starships and to whom they belong — especially the fighters, which often come unidentified in small plastic bags. The Super Galactic Dreadnoughts (what a name!), however, seem the least in need of ID aids of any of the Superior ships. The added information on the races of Starfleet Wars is a welcome addition, and the illustrations accompanying each description of an individual fleet commander or personality is helpful in visualizing the "the enemy" in fleet actions (provided one cares about such niceties).

However, unless you're a real Starfleet Wars fan, STARSHIPS will likely prove to be of such limited scope as to be of little value. The ship designs pictured show a lack of imagination in several instances: the Carnivore Polecat class looks suspiciously like a certain battlestar in search of a bright and shining planet of a couple of TV seasons ago. The Terran Victory class resembles Darth Vader's star destroyer with its wings clipped. The Terran Meteor attack craft are X-wings, complete with R-2 units nestled behind the cockpit! And I can just see the arguments that "add 5%" rule is going to cause with those who don't have the manual.

If you're really into the Starfleet Wars universe, you might find this manual a worthwhile buy for $3.50. Casual players — and those wishing to avoid arguments — might as well pass.

—William A. Barton


This notebook has a crease down the back. It folds out to double as a GM screen. The contrivance is sturdy and useful. There is room in this notebook to keep a hefty dungeon.

However, T&T is about the least FRPG to really need a product like this! The game is so simple that FBI had to duplicate some material to fill up even two reference sheets.

A high quality product, though, I predict it will see use in a lot of games, besides the one for which it was intended.

—Forrest Johnson

MINIATURES

ZHODANI (Maritan Metals): $2.95. Approved for Traveller, 12 15mm miniature figures in bubble pack. Released 1981.

Maritan Metals has at last released a pack of ZHODANI for its line of Traveller 15mm miniatures. As the Zhodani are the main enemies of the Imperium in GDW's Traveller universe, one would have thought a pack of such figures would have been one of the initial releases. The problem was obviously distinguishing the Zhodani from other human figures. The answer, unfortunately, seems to have eluded Maritan Metals. The set is disappointing. Of the 12 figures, only six are actual Zhodani; the rest are robots: three warbots and three quasi clearly intended to be R-2 units! (Look out Imperium — the Zhodani apparently have allied themselves with the Rebels! May the Force be with them.)

The six Zhodani appear to be officers; they carry only handguns and seem to be in some sort of uniform. There are only two different poses, neither of which are suitable for combat. And the facial features are almost nonexistent — mere holes for eyes and mouth, the worst on any of the MM Traveller figures yet. If mixed with other figures from the Mercenary and Marines pack, these figures would be useful as officers in a Zhodani force. But so would many of the Adventurers figures. The Warbots are nicely flicke-looking and different enough from the warbots in the Robots pack to use in a Zhodani-Imperium mechanized clash. And if you wanted R-2 units, well, now you've got 'em (and I suppose if there's a Droyne pack in the works, Yoda will be included somehow — right size, you know).

Ah well. If you're collecting the MM Traveller miniatures, add a set of ZHODANI to your collection — after all, it's only three bucks. But I certainly could have hoped for more than this. And I certainly will expect more from future sets, hopefully with Aslan and other Traveller aliens. You should, too. Let's hope we're not disappointed too many more times. Okay, MM?

—William A. Barton
COMPUTER GAMES

ABM (Muse Software); $29.95. Disk for 32K Apple. One player; playing time 30 minutes. Published 1981.

ABM is an Apple version of the popular arcade game Missile Command. The player is defending six East Coast cities against an endless onslaught of nuclear ICBMs (some of them MRV's), using anti-ballistic missiles launched from five stations stationed in between the cities. The ABMs are aimed using a crosshair controlled by the paddles/joystick and are fired using the paddle buttons. Two of the bases fire a more powerful ABM, and all of the bases have the capability to recover from nuclear blasts. Once the game is started, it continues until all six cities have been completely destroyed.

I have to give this game good ratings on a number of points. The graphics and sound are very well done - it's easy to simultaneously update the traces of a dozen missiles while producing shapes and sounds for a few explosions. The game is very playable and very addictive. In short, it's a nicely done piece of software.

This game, however, cannot compete with the actual arcade version. It lacks both the speed (it's just not fast) and the little extra that keeps people dropping quarters into Missile Command. Also, any review copy managed to destroy itself while a friend was boating it up, a disturbing event, to say the least.

In the end, the question is whether or not you want to spend the money for another arcade game. If so, then I can recommend ABM to you with the above caveats.

- Bruce F. Webster

GALACTIC ATTACK (Siro-Tech Software); $29.95. Disk for 48K Apple with DOS 3.3 or Language Card. One player; playing time 30 minutes to several hours. Published 1981.

GALACTIC ATTACK is a real-time space-war simulation with strong Trek overtones (phasers, torpedoes, shields, energy levels - even the ships look strangely familiar), but the game plays far differently from any Trek game I've ever seen. The main objective is to recapture the planets in the solar system occupied by Kzinti armies (initially all but Earth/Luna) while defending yourself against Kzinti ships. Capturing a planet requires ship-to-ship combat (they fire back, too, followed by beaming down troops carried from planets you control). Ship-to-ship combat involves laying down lines of torpedoes, dodging the ones coming at you, maneuvering for position and just generally trying to blow the Kzinti out of the sky before they do the same to you.

I have very high praise for GALACTIC ATTACK. The graphics are superb, considering the real-time environment and all the things the program has to do. The Kzinti ships are tough and smart - not like the Klingon warships found in most Star Trek games - and wonder of wonders, you really do have to use tactics to survive each encounter. If you just stand still and shoot at them, you will usually be blown away. The need to capture planets is a nice twist, and it takes a while to learn just how to best do it. A nice feature for the real-time environment is the use of the letters QWE/ASD/ZXC as a directional keypad for quick angle entry (though you can also use numbers, if you wish). And one other thing: you don't go looking for Kzinti ships... they come looking for you.

As good as GALACTIC ATTACK is, it has one major flaw and several minor ones. The major one is that a game in progress can't be saved (though you can put it in "status" to take care of emergency matters). This flaw is inexcusable in any game requiring more than an hour to play, and doubly so in this case because GA was written in Pascal, which has very powerful disk I/O capabilities. The two most annoying minor ones are the lack of audio feedback (i.e., a beep) when erroneous input is received and the inequities in the scoring algorithm that assigns your point total at the end. Also, be warned that your typing skills will be sorely tested - it can be fatal to take your eyes off the screen for even a few seconds, and if you're a slow typer, you may find yourself turned into an expanding ball of gas before you get off more than a few shots.

Despite the above, I recommend GALACTIC ATTACK with few reservations. It gives you far more for your money than a lot of other games costing the same. Because the difficulty level can be adjusted to a very high point, it will be a long time before you master this game.

- Bruce F. Webster

UNIVERSE III is a computer-moderated correspondence game in which each player commands a starship entering a new universe to explore, colonize, and conquer new worlds, contending with other players and unknown hazards. Each time you send in a turn, the computer will evaluate it with respect to the current game situation and other players' moves, and send you a printout showing your current status. When you "meet" other players, you can send them messages... to trade, negotiate, or intimidate.

UNIVERSE III IS THE "STATE-OF-THE-ART" COMPUTER GAME TODAY. WHY?

QUALITY - UNIVERSE III is a licensed version of UNIVERSE II, which was the most highly rated play-by-mail game in the country last year, according to THE SPACE GAMER's 1980 Game Survey. It ranked ahead of both STARWEB and THE TRIBES OF CRANE.

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You owe yourself some fun time and you have just loaded the new Star Warrior into your computer. Suddenly, you are one of the Furies andtribution is your business.

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In Scenario 1, you are on a diversionary mission for the assassination attempt. You want to do as much damage to the enemy units as possible.

The terrain is dangerous and difficult. The enemy forces are powerful and varied. You may not see the enemy when you are both in the same general area. But on the other hand, the enemy may not see you either. There is always the chance of an attack by an invisible enemy.

There are two scenarios and five levels of difficulty. You must stay alive for the whole game. If you die, you must start all over again.

You have the choice of suits and equipment, a wide range of movements and special combat and special commands.

In other words, you can do all the things you want to do in the game so that you will never lose. You will never lose. You will never lose. You will never lose. You will never lose.

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GALAXY WARS (Broderbund Software, Box 3266, Eugene OR 97403; $24.95, 32K disk by Starcraft for the Apple. One player. Published 1980.

This one should have been named Fish in Space. In order to win you must pilot a missile through an obstacle course of fish(!) and knock out alien saucers. GALAXY WARS is a Japanese import marketed by Broderbund Software, and it's quite a decent little arcade game. Only I found myself waiting for Mothra or Godzilla to rear up out of the schools of fish and take a swipe at my missile.

There are a few other disconcerting things about GALAXY WARS, although none of them really detract from the overall game. For one, you have to turn your monitor on its side unless you prefer to visualize your missile as a bazooka shell. And then there are the choreographed little saucers all synchronized with the opening sound routine, calling to mind the June Taylor Dancers or a Bushy Berkeley musical.

Perhaps these are not logical inconsistencies at all, but quite natural to the Oriental mind... if we Westerners buy the line about the moon being made of green cheese, why not swarms of fish roaming the astral pathways? And GALAXY is fun to play, as much fun as any imponderable game I have seen. Now if we can just get the "lethal writhing electrical worms" from Space Invaders onto hook...

— Dave Albert

(Reprint courtesy of SoftSide magazine.)

LOORDS OF KARMA (Avalon Hill); $20.00. Tape for the 48K TRS-80, and 32K Apple and Pet. One player; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

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This adventure is for the de-goodeers of the world, the paladins, the embodiements of the chivalric code. The whole point of the adventure is to do good deeds. By doing so, you enure yourself a place in heaven, via the All Express. The way that all this is carried out is in the scoring system — the more good that you do, the more "karma points" you accumulate — an ironic "westernization" of the concept of karma. There are all sorts of ways to get karma points — you can slay monsters, rescue the princess, donate to the charity of your choice... I wouldn't be surprised if there was even a little old lady to escort across a busy street. If you prefer activities of the evil persuasion, then be prepared to evaluate your performance on a negative scale, for you will get X-karma points if you're nasty.

Winning the game is quite simple: When you reach a certain total of karma points (over 200) you will be elevated to heaven upon performance of certain acts. Should you get killed in your wanderings, don't despair: you will be promptly resurrected on a mountain top, (empty-handed, of course). But the karma points accumulated in your previous incarnations will still be there. Should your karma point total be in the negative range, be prepared to burn in purgatory prior to rebirth. If anything, this might be the principal failing of LORDS OF KARMA: You are always reborn. Thus, if you have the patience to keep playing away, you can win in a single sitting. There is really no challenge to winning, then... just patience.

There are no major differences between this adventure and the vast majority of other "adventure-types" as far as execution is concerned. Simple two word commands are entered for actions. One drawback is that upon arriving at a new location you must specify an examination, otherwise you get only the most cursory description of the scene and no mention of possible exits.

All in all, LORDS OF KARMA is a good adventure. There are plenty of locations and a fairly wide variety of situations to face. The program is done in machine language and executes quickly. It is well written and thematically consistent, and requires no esoteric knowledge on the part of the user. If you like this type of computer game, then I would recommend LORDS OF KARMA. It is really quite enjoyable. However, if you are expecting more than a simple adventure, then you may be disappointed. Avalon Hill has not broken any new ground; they have only covered known territory well.

— Dave Albert

(Reprint courtesy of SoftSide magazine.)

SKING (Activision), 759 E. Evelyn Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086; $19.95. Designed by Bob Whitehead. Video cartridge for the Atari. Includes one cartridge and an instruction booklet. One player; playing time 1-3 minutes. Published 1980.

SKING is a video game using a joystick controller to guide the skier figure through the ten courses provided. The first five games are slalom runs with increasing numbers of gates and/or faster speeds. The second five are downhill runs of distances ranging from 200 to 900 meters and gaining speed with each step. Eight of the scenarios are always the same, but the toughest slalom and downhill runs are randomly set each time selected.

SKING is a mechanically simple game with eight skier positions and three types of terrain: trees, moguls, and gate flags. The only options available to the player are turning the skier and jumping over moguls. But for all its simplicity, it is an involving, fascinating game. With trees zooming by, the game gives the feel of skiing, and where else can you live ski for the sixth time without breaking a leg? It is a one-player game, so competitions have to be a matter of noting times and taking turns, which at first seems like a bother.

SKING is a simple game with excellent graphics and varying scenarios. It's a must for those with the Atari system.

— Richard A. Edwards

HISTORICAL GAMES

ALARIC THE GOTH (Strategic Studies Games); $10.00. Designed by Paul L. Van Patton, Jr. One 7-page rulebook, a 22" x 25" three color map, and 480 counters. Two to six players; playing time two to four or more hours. Published 1980.

ALARIC is a strategic level simulation of the end of the Roman Empire and its fall to the barbarians. One player takes the Roman side—taxing provinces, raising different troop and ship types, and trying to keep the empire together as best he can. The other one to five players control different barbarian groups which try to move into imperial territory to set up kingdoms of their own.

ALARIC is very true to its period with a nicely done map of the western half of the Roman Empire including Africa, colorful counters, and no charts. Simple, 3x3-like rules and similarly easy movement rules make the rules easy to understand and use. Designer's notes show a commitment to historical accuracy in general and the player's notes give good hints on strategy.

The only debatable point is the play balance, which heavily favors the barbarians as a whole. The only way Rome can stand is to divide the invaders against themselves, something which the game supplies few mechanics for.

ALARIC THE GOTH is a fair history, a good game, and great fun.

— Richard A. Edwards
Tonight the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, California is the scene for what will be an interesting fight between Smith and Thompson.

Smith has good control over his fights and usually strikes first. He has a big punch and can knock out his opponent. Smith has been known to go down when hit with a good punch. Smith has also been known to cut. He tends to tire in the later rounds and is easy to hit. Smith's record is 8 wins, 1 loss, 1 draw with 4 knockouts.

Thompson is a good counterpuncher, but he does not have a knockout punch. He has a good killer instinct and will attack his opponent if he looks hurt. Thompson has great endurance and defensive skills making him hard to hit. Thompson's record is 6 wins, 2 losses, no draws and no knockouts.

Smith is the favorite to win this bout.

The fight is about to begin . . .

Computer Boxing simulates professional boxing through a correspondence game. It allows for interaction between players through a continuous game that may be entered at any time. In creating this computer simulation, I have tried to bring together all the subtle factors involved in the sport of professional boxing. Through the use of a computer, we are able to interrelate many subtle effects of skill, condition, tactics and fighter initiative to determine the outcome blow-by-blow and round-by-round. The actual rules are brief because the computer will handle all the details once the data is available. The objective of the game is to win each boxing match and as a result rise in the ranking to finally become world champion.

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PUBLICATIONS

GAME MERCHANT (P.O. Box 10068, Detroit, Michigan 48210), monthly, $8/year or free in many game shops. 24 pages. Editor Alex Marciniuzyn. First published 1981.

GAME MERCHANT originated as a tabloid newspaper delivered free to game shops. Game manufacturers advertising in the magazine pay for printing and distribution. Shop owners are happy to give space to advertisements for items they might be selling. The advertisers reach at least 10,000 readers. The ads tend to come from the smaller companies with a few games or with some accessory such as dice, ring binders, or even a disc-rolling contraption. In the first four issues I saw ads for many items I had known nothing about.

GAME MERCHANT also includes hobby news submitted by manufacturers. No. 3, for example, mentioned a settlement of the TSR-Dave Arnesson lawsuit, the planned sequels to the popular Ace of Aces game, news from miniatures companies, and lists of future releases from Metagaming and FGU.

GM has now changed to magazine size and is available to individuals by subscription. Subscribers will receive a special "Supplement" [sic] to include "new modular scenarios, maps, character ideas, and more." Without seeing the subscribers-only material I cannot say with certainty whether this publication is worth $8 a year. However, the supplements will have to be extraordinarily long or good. I suggest you try to find GM at your local game shop (ask your dealer to request some, since they're free) if you want a look.

- Lewis Pulipher

MAGNETIC FANTASIES (Magnetic Fantasies), $2.55. Edited and published by Claude Plum, Richard Koch, and Amor Taylor. 8 1/2" x 11" offset printed and stapled. Published bi-monthly. First published February 1981.

MAGNETIC FANTASIES describes itself as being "devoted to the art of Computerized Fantasy Simulations," or, as they abbreviate it, CFS. Its goal is to cover the ever growing field of computer RPGs spawned by the original Adventure program from MIT. The issue I received (the first ever published) contained a few editors, some reviews, a few humorous articles, lists of programs and articles dealing with CFSs, a cartoon strip, and so on.

Plum et al. have come up with a good idea. CFSs are probably the best-selling computer games on the market right now. Indeed, with all the free versions published in various computer magazines, it seems that anyone with a home computer has at least one such game on a cassette or disk somewhere. And MAGNETIC FANTASIES has the makings of becoming the fadzine of computer RPG enthusiasts. The layout and artwork are very good for a fadzine, and while the articles are a little weak, they do fill the pages.

Unfortunately, MF suffers from two major problems. First is the price: $2.55 is a ridiculous price, given the quality of this publication and the articles therein. The second is that the editors have a case of the "terminal cutout,"

- Bruce P. Webster

WYRM FOOTNOTES (Chaosium): $2.25 per issue or $8/year (4 issues). Edited by Charlie Frank. 8 1/2" x 11", 32-pages.

The old Wyrms' Footnotes was a Chaosium house organ of amateur quality. Now WYRM FOOTNOTES is dedicated solely to providing source material for RuneQuest. The magazine has both one-shot and continuing articles of "official" RQ material available nowhere else.

This is Valhalla for the Glorantha gamer. Regular features cover RuneQuest variants and clarifications, Gloranthan history, geography and theology, and new monsters and magic-gnomes.

The writing style is dry to the point of resembling a social studies reading assignment. Emphasis should also be shifted from academic to practical: knowing the life stages of Yelm, God of Light, may be enlightening but how does it apply to running him as an NPC on that next adventure? WYRM FOOTNOTES is also heavily oriented to the gamer running a Gloranthan campaign (Glorantha is The Chaosium's "special fantasy world"; three-fourths of this material cannot be used to a non-Gloranthan gamer.

I found the magazine to be required reading for the Glorantha-oriented RQ gamer, but only optional for the non-Glorantha GM.

- W.G. Armintout

THE TRIBES OF CRANE (Schubel & Son)

Game News. Three new cities have been built by players within the last six months. Each of these cities is a marvel of architecture. The first of these cities, Ulann-Bator, is located west of Excal and was constructed as an administrative headquarters and military installation as well as a cultural center for the Republic of Ulann-Bator. The city was built to include an impressive cultural complex of a university, museum and theater with parks and a beautiful garden terrace with vegetation, fountains and reflecting pools. The second new city, Columbia, lies isolated in the permanent ice. Its walls are massive ice sheets towering 100 feet above the surrounding glacier. It is said to have cost over 129,000 gold to construct this city of ice. The third city is the most mysterious on Crane. The city of Sedge is a small and mysterious barbarian city set in the midst of a dense and nearly impenetrable tropical forest. Built around the ruins of an ancient reptile-worshipping civilization, its inner forbidden city is the palace of the legendary Lizard King. Many legends and rumors abound. One speaks of a gold and jeweled lizard statue, reported to be among the most valuable treasures on all Crane.

STARMASTER (Schubel & Son)

Game News. Several (player controlled, advanced position) Elder Races have become more active. There seems to be a move throughout many areas of the Central Galaxy for these Elder Races to once again establish their spheres of influence. The spheres of influence were weakened by the cataclysmic destruction of the Great War between the forces of the Lyran and those of the Swarm. Among the emerging Elders are The Goltak Swarm (a psionic, telepathic race), The Shyian State Slavic (a high technology, individual society), The Klyromes Swarm (a psionic, telepathic race), The Lyranian Star Imperium (one of the most advanced and powerful empires in the Central Galaxy), The Tsching-ka Swarm (a boosted psionic race), The Gigantese Socialist State (a psychic/pace of cold technology), The Ictlan Ameba (a lower technology, telepathic society), and The Onon-Tau Swarm (a psionic, telepathic race of great physical strength). It is believed that other Elder Races will become more active in the near future.

- George Schubel

UNIVERSE II (Clemens & Associates)

Company News. Universe II will be closed for vacation between September 15 and October 15. No news will be processed during that period.

Game News

Quadran I. Both the Reganians and the Ixli are continuing their buildups. It is rumored that one Etul star system is in danger of being captured.

Quadran II. A major exploration effort is being made in the Angellsus area. A Terran starship is placing space mine fields in strategic locations to block rapid ship movement between Zosma and Algthua.

Quadran III. The Muax Raider lost several ships, but are still pushing toward Alkes. Muax successes may be due to a new "cloaking" device.

Quadran IV. A major invasion of the Rega- nian Empire by Terran starships is in progress. The I.D.C. base is growing rapidly.

- Jon Clemens

PBM Update reports on professionally-mod- erated play-by-mail games. Notices are monthly. Copy deadline is 5 days previous to the first of the month, for the issue in which the notice is to appear. [Deadline for the March issue is January 1.] All copy should be typewritten and double-spaced. Notices should not exceed 200 words in length. TSG reserves the right to edit copy as necessary.
LETTERS

I was pleased to read that computerized versions of some of your games may soon be available. However, I have some misgivings about them being developed and marketed by an established game company. I realize that many of the problems involved with producing a computer game are avoided by taking this route, but the tradeoffs could be disastrous.

One of your trademarks has been good, simple products at reasonable prices, a philosophy not shared by most computer gaming companies. Commercial computer games generally fall into the following categories:

- Poorly done and inexpensive
- Poorly done and not so inexpensive
- Well done and overpriced
- Well done and reasonably priced

Only a handful of computer games are in the last category. I hope your games will join them.

A reasonable price for a computer game depends on a number of factors: high-replay value, computer opponent options, and multiple scenarios will raise a game's basic value. If I find that the computer implementations do not have the above factors or are overpriced, I would probably buy the $3.00 manual version and write my own program.

I have noticed that most reviews of computer games in TSG are for TRS-80 versions or TRS-80 only games. If you only offer TRS-80 versions of your games, I wouldn't be able to buy them even if they fall into the "well done and reasonably priced" category since I own an Apple II+ with disk drive. Perhaps you could run an article covering your plans on what versions will be offered, the type of graphics that will be used, the manner of play, the scenarios, etc. This would be helpful for readers like myself who don't live in the Austin area.

Dave Allen
Lisle, IL

Today I start my subscription to The Space Gamer. I have not been reading your publications long, but in the short time I have realized you have one of the best. I have unfortunately read only four of your magazines, and I especially enjoy the personal touch. The articles are interesting to read and don't read as a newspaper obituary. It appears to me you have an excellent staff. My only minor complaint is that the magazine has a little too much fantasy and computer material. I appreciate the honest (and comical) approach you take. I do feel the subscription rates are higher than other magazines but you have a higher quality magazine and do suffer double digit inflation as the rest of us. I hope TSG will give me years of enjoyment.

Cameron Bishop
Las Vegas, NV

NEWS & PLUGS

In competition with companies which have offered "argent reptiles, auric goats, and 24kt plated mages" as promotion prizes, Gamelords has announced a contest for the Terrible Tiny Tarnished Tinplate Turkey. The Turkey will go to the gamer who finds the most puns in the company's new FRP supplement, The Free City of Haven. The winner will also get a free trip to a 1982 game convention of his choice and have his name immortalized in a future Gamelords supplement.

Dynacomp has released three new games for the Atari: Alpha Fighter ($14.95 cassette/$18.95 disk), Intruder Alert ($16.95 cassette/$20.95 disk) and Giant Slalom ($14.95 cassette/$18.95 disk).


New from GDW: Invasion Earth, a board game based on "the final battle of the Solomani Rim War." Price: $11.98.

SPI is already designing two supplements for its SF RPG, Universe. Also planned: an expansion for DragonQuest.

Automated Simulations has re-released Invasion Orion with a second program, which allows players to design new scenarios and to create their own ships. Price: $24.95.

Kask's Adventure Gaming magazine (POB 12391, Norwood, Ohio 45212) has made its appearance. It is a 36-page slick monthly devoted to "the entire spectrum of the hobby." 13-issue sub: $29.00. Sample copy: $3.00.

The Game Designer's Guild has announced its 1980 awards: Ace of Ages (Nova Games), Tarforce (GDW), Empires of the Middle Ages (SPI), Streets of Stalingrad (the late Phoenix Games), and Ashamn High Lightning (GDW).

Automated Simulations has converted Temple of Apshai for the Atari, 2K. Price: $39.95.

Fidelity Electronics has filed an infringement-of-patent suit against Tryon, Inc. and Applied Concepts. Fidelity has a patent, issued November 25, 1980, on electronic board games such as "games normally played between two competitors whereas the game substitutes for the second competitor."

Reliable rumor: Richard Berg's Review of Games will soon be printing its last issue. Though it won a lot of praise, RBROG never managed to get much circulation.

Starting with issue 12, Different Worlds will be going monthly.

Dimension Six offers Concrete Wilderness, yet another post-holocaust game. The special twist is, you can play yourself as a character.

Rumor: A sequel to Panzer Prank is in development. The tentative title is Squad Leader.

FASA has purchased a half interest in High Passage, and will be handling business and distribution. The old owners will retain editorial control.

SPI is planning three introductory games for release this fall. One title: The Creature That Ate New York.


Adventures by Mail (POB 424-D, Cohoes, NY 12047) offers the PBW game Beyond the Stellar Empire. $11.00 setup, including first two turns; subsequent turns $3.50.

Task Force Games has a new address: 1110 N. Fillmore, Amarillo, TX 79107.
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